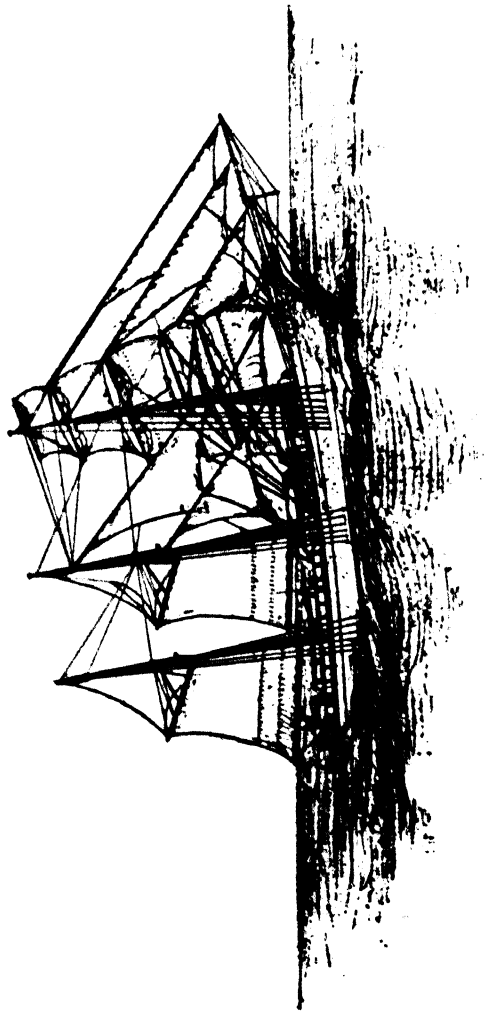


This book is with
tight
Binding

**THE TEXT IS FLY
WITHIN THE BOOK
ONLY**

CANNIBAL NIGHTS



Captain Raabe's Barkentine *Glenora* under Full Sail in the South Seas in the Early 80's. Drawn
by the Author.

CANNIBAL NIGHTS

The Reminiscences of a
Free-lance Trader

by

CAPTAIN H. E. RAABE

NEW YORK

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TO THE MEMORY OF
MY OLD FRIEND
JACK LONDON

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FOREWORD

The South Seas. What magic words!—not only to the reader of fiction and motion-picture bill-boards, but also to many a yachting enthusiast who dreams of cruises among the Islands.

The South Seas in fiction, on the film and in the fantasies of the adventurous mind are beautiful. There are, indeed, islands in those waters which would appeal to romantic youth as a lover's paradise, but only a very few men today can think back to the South Seas as they were in the '70s when many ships entering those mysterious waters disappeared without a trace; when cannibalism and piracy were rampant and only the roving free-lance traders dared to venture forth into those obscure regions to barter with the treacherous natives and to face the perils of uncharted coral reefs, savagery and starvation. Few of those early traders are alive now—they were at the height of their glory long ago, and the South Seas demanded a heavy toll.

I was one of the traders of those pioneer days in the '70s and '80s and Fate has spared me to tell of numerous strange adventures in that far-off corner of the world, tales I have often been requested to relate in print by my departed friend, Jack London.

Many episodes of that past I would rather forget. Others I would not now describe were it not that the recent deaths of old comrades have released me from old confidences. Nearly all of these events have been brought

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back to my memory on various occasions when I have been urged to share my reminiscences with friends whose company I often enjoy of an evening in Follansbee's Restaurant in Jersey City. I am, in fact, writing these recollections on the strength of their persistence. Obviously I am not a writer. I lack the imagination necessary to colour the facts in a romantic way.

I can only say that this book is at least true. It is an authentic, first-hand, personal record of days and ways and scenes that will never be known again by any voyager.

For that reason, despite literary shortcomings, I hope that what I have written may prove worth while to those with robust enough stomachs to appreciate the damnable experiences I lived through in those predatory years at sea.

H. E. RAABE

Jersey City, New Jersey
January 17, 1927

CHAPTER I

BUMPIES IN SYDNEY

FATE took me ashore one summer evening in the year 1874 in Sydney, Australia, at which port I had just arrived on the Yankee clipper *Dolphin*, as a boy before the mast. It must indeed have been Fate. I was only thirteen and a half years old then, and had no intention of leaving the clipper. I had gone aboard her in Hamburg eight months previously, as a stowaway, after running away from school, and when the Captain found me aboard he did not grumble much; he put me to work at once. Shipmasters in those days often had trouble to obtain a crew; sailing ships were numerous and good sailors hard to get—the demand was always greater than the supply. As long as a man was a good sailor and able-bodied, there were no questions asked nor papers inspected.

Though I was the only son of wealthy parents and my father a professional man, our ancestors had followed the sea for centuries and the call of it must have been in my blood. In spite of my youth I was already a sailor. My grandfather, who had commanded his own ship until he was actually a hundred years old, had seen to that.

While swaggering along the quay in Sydney that fateful evening, I was proud to be a sailor. The only thing missing from my equipment was the traditional quid of tobacco in my cheek. I had never acquired the tobacco-chewing habit because, during my first experience, when

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making an attempt on board the clipper, I had eaten the stuff and was permanently cured.

Nevertheless, in my own esteem, I was a sailor. I smoked—yes, I had started when nine years old, and the many lickings I received from teachers at school and at home were past history. Here no one cared. Let them dare try. I was a sailor. My pipe protruded from my mouth like the rakish bowsprit of a clipper. . . .

There was music in the air. It came from one of the side streets leading off the waterfront. I followed its strains and came to a large sign in front of one of the many dives. It read:

**"COME ON IN. GET THE LARGEST BUMPY OF ALE
AND SEE THE BEST FREE SHOW IN SYDNEY
WITH THE PRETTIEST BOXTRY GIRLS ON THE COAST."**

What better invitation could be extended to a deep water sailor? If he had the price of a bumpy, could he stay outside? Impossible! and I had the price. Thus Fate placed me behind the largest bumpy of extra-warm and extra-stale ale in Sydney; a bumpy which was to establish my destiny and lead me toward adventure far stranger than my youthful dreams had ever anticipated.

It was a rather large hall, closely filled with tables and chairs, most of them being occupied by that hilarious crowd which made the old-time waterfront resorts so notoriously picturesque—deep water sailors.

Captains, mates and men before the mast used to meet here on even footing; waiters clad only in trousers and undershirt were serving drinks, spilling ale and rum over the tables but never wiping them; the floor was saturated with the liquids, the atmosphere heavy with their fumes and with tobacco smoke.

At the far end of this hall there was a small stage.

BUMPIES IN SYDNEY

A rather pretty girl was singing a song about "the beautiful banks of Australia, where the maidens are pretty and gay." I had found a place near the stage and was rapidly absorbing the contents of the large bumpy, when the crowd applauded her and called for an encore, the words of which, I remember distinctly, were:

"When strolling home the other day,
Just paid off from a bark,
I fell in love with a nice young girl—
Her name was Sally Clarke:
She was dressed in flying colours,
Blue eyes—her hair was brown,
Just like a saucy boxtry girl
That knocks about Melbourne town.
Come all my lads and fill your bumpies up!
Beware of every boxtry girl that you would like to love.
Oh, I tell you true she'll jilt you if she can,
And to the Islands you must roam
To make way for another man."

The ale had commenced its deadly work upon me, and in a hilarious mood, while the crowd was cheering, I raised my bumpy, shouting:

"Go it some more, old girl. Them's my colours!"

A heavy hand slapped me on the shoulder and a voice close behind me, spoke:

"Here, sonny; have one on me. Enjoy it while you're here. Going to the Islands?"

Accepting the invitation to drink with him, I looked up and saw the owner of the voice grin at me in a most amiably patronizing manner. He was a large, heavily built man, from all appearances a sea captain.

"I don't know where I am going," I came back arrogantly, "and I don't give a damn. I belong on board the *Dolphin*. . . ."

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My exultant speech was interrupted by the announcer on the stage who informed the tumultuous audience that the two greatest swordsmen of the Orient, if not of the world, would now appear and give an exhibition of their marvelous skill, and if any man among those present could toe the mark with either of them he would receive a five pound note—an offer which was intended to impress any possible aspirant with the utter futility of such a rash undertaking.

My newly acquired friend seated himself beside me at the table. At that moment the combatants appeared and immediately engaged in a lunge and parry contest which had all the earmarks of repeated rehearsal.

Fencing, especially the slash and thrust practice of the cutlass, had always been a hobby of mine when at school, and I had developed a fair proficiency probably on account of the old viking stock within me. Now, full of enthusiasm, thanks to the ale, I said to my friend:

“I’m going to try for that five pound note or bust.”

“Go to it, boy,” he laughed, hilariously impressed, “let me see what kind of stuff you’re made of.”

The ale had won the decision. In a jiffy I was on the stage and engaged with one of the gladiators. I was quick as a cat. In rapid succession five lunges were landed upon my astonished antagonist. The crowd went wild with enthusiasm and called for a combat with the other gladiator. Here was a sailor of the old freebooter days.

“Chop him up, boy. Make shark bait out of him. Hip! Hip!”

The crowd was excited. They yelled themselves hoarse. I was the hero of the hour. The pretty girl singer had seated herself beside my friend at the table and was applauding me. This was too much. Like a streak of

BUMPIES IN SYDNEY

greased lightning I sailed in upon the second swordsman, who proved an easier victim than the first—then bedlam broke loose.

Applauding and yelling, the boisterous crowd demanded that the money should be paid over. The manager agreed that it was due me, but—would I not have a drink with him first?

Of course I would. Why should I not celebrate such a proud moment?

And so the hero of the hour seated himself in a quiet corner of this world-renowned establishment—to drink with the Manager.

Not everyone would be invited by the Manager to have a drink with him. Oh, no. The Manager was above drinking with the common rabble. But with me—the Manager considered himself honoured to have a drink with me—even if I knew nothing about knockout drops, or cigar ashes in whiskey. . . .

Peacefully I went to sleep.

CHAPTER II

I AWAKE ON THE *EMMA P*

IT was about daybreak when I awoke, with a feeling that there was something wrong with me, something strange about my surroundings. My brain would not clear. That I was in the fo'c'sle of a ship was certain—sailor's instinct told me that, but this could not be the *Dolphin* (?) (!).

I heard men snoring nearby. I tried to rise; but somehow my body did not seem to function. So I lay there, staring at the planks overhead, too much in a stupor even to try to think.

I heard a voice—somewhere I had heard that voice before:

"Mr. Kennedy," it said, "let's go for'ard and put some life into those swellheads so we can heave anchor and get under way."

There were heavy footsteps on deck but I closed my eyes again. Those footsteps did not interest me in the least. My head began to ache—it throbbed—it was racked—it was—Oh! What a feeling!

Suddenly a hand grabbed me by the shirt collar and I felt myself yanked out of the bunk and landed on deck.

Again the same voice spoke. It sounded like the roar of distant breakers.

"Hell! This is the youngster I saw in Dave's yesterday, trying to upset the whole place. Well, I'm going to hold on to him; he'll be a kid to my liking, I bet! Hey! You little spitfire, get up on your feet."

I AWAKE ON THE *EMMA P.*

The last words were accompanied by a boost with a heavy sea boot, which shook all the remaining sleep out of me and raised me to my feet. There before my startled eyes stood my friend of yesterday.

In speechless surprise I stared at him, with all the events of the day flashing through my mind while he and his companion seemed to gloat over my utter wretchedness.

"Well," he finally said, grinning, "maybe you're going to the Islands after all, hey? Know where you are?"

I did not know and shook my head which was beginning to reel like a top in its last wobbly turns. I would have fallen to the deck had he not supported me.

"Well, sonny," he enlightened me, "you are on board the Nova Scotia bark *Emma P.* bound for the Islands. I am Captain McPurden, owner and master. This is Mr. Kennedy, the First Mate. So you thought you were going to get a five pound note out of Dave, hey? Well, boy," he laughed, jovially slapping me on the back, "they don't do things that way in a joint like Dave's, but you stick to me and you'll earn many a five pound note on board of this packet."

Then addressing Mr. Kennedy he said:

"This youngster is a regular devil with the carving tools, and he sure started Hell agoing in Dave's yesterday. We can make good use of him; he'll be handy in shore raids, even if he's only a kid."

Then again addressing me, he chuckled:

"Well, son, you don't belong in the fo'c'sle. You can pack your duds aft. Shake a leg, now! Where is your outfit?"

"My outfit? It's all on board the clipper. I must have been shanghaied," I answered, recovering from my surprise, but feeling no more elated over my discovery.

The crew by now had all tumbled out of their bunks.

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Apparently none of them exhibited any excess of sympathy because of my mishap—a volley of laughter greeted this last enlightening statement of mine.

“So you were really shanghaied?” roared Mr. Kennedy, mocking at my innocence. “Well, well! That is too bad. I suppose we ought to send you over to the clipper now to get your duds—hey? Well, my lad, all the outfit you’ll need you can get right on board here. We don’t wear much around here and we have a slop chest. Now you go on aft and get some black coffee into you. That’ll brace you up some.”

Aft in the cabin, two men were sitting at the table absorbing their breakfast. One of them, a rough-looking fellow, glanced up as I entered and demanded what I wanted. I told him that the Captain had ordered me aft and that I was to get my breakfast.

“Sit down, then,” he grumbled, “and help yourself. I am Mr. Johnson, the Second Mate, and this is Mr. Guernev, the supercargo. Where’d you come from?”

Seating myself, I told him of my unconscious arrival on board.

He also seemed to enjoy my misfortune.

“I’ll be damned!” he finally consoled me no less mirthfully than the rest; “that is just the way I joined this packet, only I had an argument with Dave; and when he asked me to have a drink to make up, he fixed it. That was six years ago and here I am, Second Mate. Well, stick to it, boy; lots of money in this game.”

“But how did I get on board? Mr. Johnson,” I asked. “Who brought me here?”

“Oh, that’s easy,” he laughed; “Dave had one of the men for’ard take care of you. He knows we’re always looking for hands, but everybody don’t land in the cabin. The skipper must ’a taken a liking to you. When there’s

men to be gotten Dave knows how to get 'em. Sydney an' Liverpool are the shanghaiing ports, but we're going shorthanded; need a lot o' men in the trading game; always someone getting lost. Hurry up, now; we got to turn to."

Breakfast being over we started to unfurl sails—what a dirty lot of rags they were!—and while unfurling the main topgallant sail I could not help casting longing glances at the clean Yankee clipper anchored about half a mile away. The difference was too appalling.

When all sails were flapping in the light breeze we started to heave anchor. On board the clipper this task had always been accompanied by such chanteys as "Sally Brown" or "The Sweetest Girl I Know," but here for the first time I helped pump the windlass to the tune of "Sixteen Men on the Dead Man's Chest," and for the first time since running away from school I thought of my mother and sisters. I really was thinking of my future, even while remorseful thoughts whirled through my brain.

What kind of trade did this packet engage in? What could the Captain have meant by "shore raids"? All this was new to me. Mechanically I heaved away at the windlass, while my head began to clear—there is no better exercise than that rhythmic up and down motion at the windlass. But still I felt dejected.

The man at my elbow spoke:

"Say, kid, the Captain has taken quite a shine to you. Gee! He is shipping you aft. Bet he'll make you cockswain of one of the boats. Keep your weather eye open an' throw your conscience overboard—conscience don't help you any in this game."

"What do you know about my conscience?" I asked him.

"Oh, I know your kind all right," he grinned. "You

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can't fool me. I come from the top of the ladder myself—been through Oxford, society and all that, but things went wrong with me—a girl and the redeye and now Hell.”

I looked at him grinning at me and could not help noticing that although his features were quite repulsive and betrayed considerable dissipation his face plainly showed the characteristics of a scholar. There was something likeable about this chap. I felt friendly toward him, and that this feeling was mutual I soon discovered. When the anchor was up and we were bracing to the wind he stuck right at my heels, and finally said:

“I kind of like you myself, kid. I notice the Old Man is keeping his eye on you. He'll sure put you in charge of one of the boats for landing parties and I want to be in your crew. You just call me Bunk. That's my name around here.”

Thus a pact of friendship was formed which was to last for many years. Fate brought a true friend to me, one of the best I ever had as will be seen later—a friend I shall never forget, for on two occasions he saved my life, and on another occasion I saved his. Years afterward he died for me.

By this time we were well under way, and when we were passing within a hundred yards of the *Dolphin*, Bunk caught me waving my hand at her and cautioned me:

“Don't do that, boy, they may get a revenue cutter on our heels if they think we got one of their crew, 'cause it's hard to get hands just now and the Old Man don't agree with the government. Stick to the ship. The skipper likes you and you won't be sorry.”

I did not feel as much at home here as on the *Dolphin*, but here I was, outward bound, destination unknown, in the hands of Fate, and, come what might, I would make the best of it.

At least I had found one friend. Long acquaintance is not necessary to establish friendship. True friends often feel affection for each other at first sight. Bunk's features were hideous, but his heart!—already I felt its helpful and benign influence. My depressed feeling began to wear away.

"Tell me, Bunk," I asked while we were coiling-up the lines, "what is this all about? Where are we going, and what do they mean by a trader? The Second said something about 'short handed'. Hell! We got nearly as many men here as on the *Dolphin* and she's more than twice the size of this tub. Where are they going to get more men, and why so many?"

"You'll soon find out," was his reply. "We ain't got half our crew yet. We're bound for Rennell Island. That's where we pick up a bunch of rummies. Need lots of hands in this game. You see we trade with the niggers round the Islands and that means watch out or they'll invite us to a picnic."

"A picnic? What's the reason we shouldn't accept?" I asked in astonishment.

"Damn good reason!" he laughed. "We'd be the picnic and they'd do the picnicking. Ever hear about cannibals?"

Cannibals! The dreams of my childhood were to be realized. Hopefully I said:

"Gee, Bunk! Next thing you'll be telling me about pirates!"

"Yes, that's just what I will tell you," he said, looking at me earnestly. "When we get west of the Torres Straits or north of Papua—and we may get there sometime on this trip—we are liable to run across them. They're Malays and a damned bloody lot. A trader is just what they like to get—pearls and pearl shell, you know. . . ."

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There came a sudden interruption like the snap of a released spring.

"Blimme, Bunk, the niggers o' Papua'll cut yer gizzard out's quick 's any o' the pirates," a shrill voice had started to prattle behind me, and a slap on the back almost sent me sprawling. "This kid's pirate enough hisself." The voice kept rattling on in rapid fire. "If you'd a stayed sober like me you'd 'a seen him—done me heart good. Shake, bobby!" With this last remark I was whirled around. Confronting me stood a dynamic little fellow with brick red hair, a cauliflower ear and a broken nose. His face was so covered with freckles that they looked as though each one of them was trying to monopolize his whole countenance. His light blue eyes were fairly dancing, while he seemed to mistake my right arm for a pump-handle.

"'Twas me, me bully, as brung you aboard after Dave'd done ye th' dirty an' give you the shang, and I damn near knocked 'is 'ead orf," he plugged along joyously. "'Y' are on the right ship now. No bloomin' Yankee clipper's the place for you—scrubbin' pint an' washin deck. Cockney's me name an'—"

This cordial reception was cut short by the Captain who had taken it all in from his position at the taffrail, evidently pleased with my absorption by the clan.

"Son," he called; "come aft here."

"'Son,' he's callin' ye now," Cockney hollered after me. "Wait till he's cracked an' he'll be callin' ye 'son-of-a—'"

A roar of laughter from the deck and quarterdeck was the tribute to Cockney's wit. It was stilled only by Mr. Guernsey who appeared at the poop ladder with a bottle and a tumbler, shouting, "Splice the main brace!"

As may be suspected, this command means, for all hands

to file aft and receive their liquor. The practice has long since been dispensed with on board of American and English vessels, but the old-time traders continued it throughout their happy-go-lucky existence.

Did we ever think of scrubbing paint and washing deck? No; and the deck showed it. So long as the dirt did not interfere with the handling of the ship or clog the scuppers it stayed where it was until a kindly sea washed it overboard. Work, such as repairing rigging or mending sails? Yes; but not until it was necessary. Paint? Yes; when we went in shore and then we painted red and applied it generously. We were rovers, not workers. We lived to-day; tomorrow might never come to some of us.

After the main brace was properly spliced and everybody happy the Captain turned me over to Mr. Guerney.

"Show this young fire-eater the tools," he said, "they ought to interest him. Some of them may need a little cleaning and oiling."

Down to the lazaret I followed Mr. Guerney, and there my eyes beheld the "tools." My heart fairly danced with joy. There were racks of them—French Cassepots, German Needle-fires, Colts, Rogers and Spencers and as varied an assortment of cutlasses as any collector could dream of. I fairly fondled those "tools." I could have spent a week in this stuffy lazaret by the light of that smoky oil lamp, going without meals or sleep.

Cannibals, pirates, guns, pistols and cutlasses and a day-dreaming boy of thirteen. What a combination! Oh, how fortune had smiled on me the day before when I put two shillings in my pocket before going in shore, in Sydney!

The entrance of Captain McPurden interrupted my dreams. He beamed down on me.

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"Enjoying yourself?" Picking up a Colt forty-five, he asked: "Do you think you can handle one of these?"

"I never tried but I think I can learn," I replied hopefully.

"Well," he said, handing me the pistol and a box of cartridges, "keep those in your bunk and do some practising when you get a chance. Everybody on board here knows how to shoot. The bunch we take on from the Island are only decoys. We handle them rough. Phew! it's hot in here, you better come back on deck."

On deck he again addressed me. It was evident that I was to be initiated properly.

"How are you at handling a boat?"

I could truly tell him that handling a small boat in a seaway was second nature with me.

"That's good," he said. "We need good boatmen in this business, but you'll have to learn something yet. Suppose you'd have to sweep a blind lagoon?"

"What's that?" I asked, very much perplexed.

"A blind lagoon," he said, "is a small bay on a coral island. It's different from an open lagoon. It's cut off from the sea by a sand bar that is just about awash at high tide. Sweeping a blind lagoon means bringing a small boat over the bar with the breakers. You have to let the men lay on the oars until you sight a big one, then you sing out to your crew so they catch their stroke with the breaker. If you ain't quick, or fumble, you get barred and fill with the next breaker. Now I am going to give you starboard boat number two. See, she's a square ender. How would you handle her over the bar, or beach her?"

"I would turn her stern on to the beach," I replied without hesitation.

"Hell!" he said, "I guess you'll do. Now I want you

to pick two men for your boat. The crew will be filled by men from the Island but two good ones are wanted in a landing party. Go and pick your ballies and let me see who they are."

Immediately I went for'ard and came back with Bunk and Cockney. The old man laughed.

"I'll be damned!" he said to Mr. Kennedy. "If the kid didn't pick the best men in the bunch." Then to me: "That'll do. You'll be a regular trader before the end of the trip, boy. One of the main things is, knowing men when you see them. Don't go by their size; if you do you'll get left nine times out of ten, but the stuff they're made of, that counts. Yes; and looks don't count," he added, with a wink at Bunk.

"Mr. Guernsey," he bellowed, "on with the main brace! Come aft, boys; let's drink to the coming devil of the Islands."

The *Emma P.* hailed from Digby, Nova Scotia. The name of that town was displayed on her stern in faded letters, but at the time when I joined her she had not left the South Pacific for seven years. She was one of the old free-lance traders, a type now extinct—bark-rigged, with the lines of a yacht, yet broad of beam, of about five hundred tons capacity. She was the fastest and most able of that picturesque fleet. Her size enabled her to carry sufficient crew and provisions to take in the remotest islands—whether the natives were friendly or not—and return either to Sydney or Melbourne after an eight or ten months' cruise among the Islands, with a fortune in shell, coral and other imperishable native goods in her hold, and a still greater fortune in valuable pearls in the strongbox of her cabin.

There were ten boats on her gallows—five times as many as a freighter of her size used to carry. Thus she

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was equipped for landing parties, and pearl diving, after the native divers had been coerced on board. The occasional loss of a boat did not cripple her.

Captain McPurden was a native of Nova Scotia, but little did he know about his native land. The South Sea was his home. Quite different from the traditional blue-nose skipper, he was of a carefree, jovial disposition. His regular crew liked him, but the pick-up men, consisting mostly of beach-combers, feared him. When drunk he could be a fiend; when sober, as I was soon to find out, he was a philosopher. I had sailed with him for almost a year before I learned that he had a wife living in Nova Scotia. He never heard from her, and when I had been with him for three years and we visited his native land he discovered that she had divorced him almost three years earlier.

Mr. Kennedy, the First Mate, was also a Nova Scotia man, a splendid navigator, with remarkably good judgment. He had an enormous capacity for liquor. As Captain McPurden once remarked: "Kennedy drinks between drinks but he always stays sober. When I get rich I'm going to fill the hold full of rum and shove him into it. Then, when he's got her sucked dry and comes up more than half drunk I'll drop dead and he can have the ship."

Quite different was Mr. Johnson, the Second Mate. He was a native of California, and of Scandinavian parentage. He knew nothing of the science of navigation but he could handle a ship to perfection with log and lead. He was fearless but inclined to be a bucco. Captain McPurden often had to warn him. "Mr. Johnson," he would say, "save the rough stuff for the beach-combers or I'll shanghai you on a freighter. Our regular men won't stand for it."

This warning always had the desired effect, for to go back to freighting was about the most disgraceful come-down that a trader would suffer. The "stewpit," as we called the roasting pits of the cannibals; a spearthrust, or the jaws of a tiger shark—yes; even beach-combing—were to be preferred to common labour on a freighter.

On the "coast"—that was our way of referring to the Australian ports—we were known as "The Privateers." We were proud of that name as the chorus of this old song will show:

"The Privateers are roaming
While the sea goes mountain high;
Together we will plunder
Together we will die.
The laws are our foes,
No fear with us goes;
Before we work for government
We'll be bound in chains and ir'ns."

Our supercargo, Mr. Guerney, was a gentleman. He was always immaculately clean—a condition made only the more appalling by the appearance of the rest of us. Even at sea he wore a clean silk shirt, tie and white duck trousers—yes; even shoes. Many a wreath-crowned native girl used to smile up at him from her canoe when he stood at the rail. But he rarely went in shore with a landing party. If one of the chiefs had suddenly had an ambition to adopt him as son-in-law and heir to the throne, guns would not have saved him from the chief's warriors. Mr. Guerney came of a very fine English or Scotch family. His manners were perfect. He took his liquor as a gentleman should. In fact, he was the Beau Brummel of the fleet but he knew nothing of sailorizing, nor took any interest in any part of the ship.

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The cook was a master of his profession—the most important man on board. He was a Spaniard but had been in the South Sea trade since boyhood and spoke several of the native languages quite fluently.

The regulars, as the crew were called, were a hard lot—good sailormen, happy-go-lucky rum destroyers, every one of them.

Bunk had the distinction of being a crack shot with rifle or pistol. He could clip a penny in midair nine times out of ten. He was an Australian by birth and loyal to a fault.

Cockney, Bunk's pal, was an ex-prizefighter. He was a jolly little fellow, always ready for a fight. That had been his downfall—too many fights outside the ring.

Besides Bunk and Cockney there were eight other men. All but two of these were jolly, carefree fellows, hard drinkers, good mixers and ready to help a shipmate. The two exceptions did not seem to fit in with the regulars. They had been left-overs from a crowd of beach-combers from a previous trip. They were surly, discontented and always hanging back when there was work to do. They were the sore spots in Mr. Johnson's eye.

"If I had them fellows on a 'round-the-Horner'," he used to growl, "I'd have 'em jump the rail before we'd be a month out."

But this was not a round-the-Horner—this was a trader.

Such was the crew of the *Emma P.*—men whose type today is extinct. It took men with nerve—not the nerve characteristic of a soldier, who presents a brave front, inspired by music and a cheering crowd and the thought of being decked with medals and pronounced a hero upon his turn. No; theirs was the sort of nerve that drove the forty-niners across the North American continent. Per-

I AWAKE ON THE *EMMA P.*

haps it was even a more reckless kind of nerve. The forty-niners had families to protect.

Only the very few who have ever seen a human body roasted to be feasted upon by howling devils—cold-bloodedly prepared, like a woman preparing her Thanksgiving turkey—can say that they have had a look into the depths of Hell.

If you can continue doing the Islands, with such a picture in mind, seeing yourself prepared for the pit, then you have nerve.

CHAPTER III

THE GLASS DROPS TO 27.9

A TIGER shark is not a pleasant customer to encounter in his own element. Do not be deceived by the belief that a shark must turn over to bite. That is true only of fish sharks and blue sharks. The tiger shark rushes his victim, cripples him with a blow of his ram-like snout and then devours him.

But the tiger shark is gentle compared to the octopus. If you have ever beheld the staring diabolical eyes of an octopus when making a dive, and you could dive again, then you were of the right stuff to be a success in the South Seas during pioneer days.

Yes, we used to dive ourselves, prospecting around reefs and uninhabited islands, of which there were many.

The smell of a whaler, or that of the old salt cod fishermen, who used to keep all the fish refuse in bins on deck until leaving the banks, was like perfume alongside of a prospecting trader when rotting out the shells on deck.

And the bloody fights that used to result at times when somebody would try to appropriate somebody else's shell which happened to contain a pearl. The beach-combers were great for that sort of business—knives, handspokes and belaying pins were not barred in such fights. Law there was none. It was the survival of the fittest.

Fortunately, nature had blessed me with uncommon physical strength and an iron constitution. Otherwise my memory, like that of many of my shipmates, would have

been perpetuated long ago in the traders' death tally—a mark in the companionway slide for each life—a cross mark for an officer, a straight mark for a man before the mast. There were many marks in our slide, and more to come.

Many an enthusiastic youngster has listened to me, and with sparkling eyes made the remark: "Gee, I'd liked to been there!" To most of them I have said: "Boy, you are too enthusiastic; you would not have stood the test."

In a way we were outlaws. We hated the sight of a warship. We looked upon a uniform with contempt, whether officer or enlisted man. But please do not misjudge us—do not compare us with the slinking gunman of today. We entered the gates of Hell to fight toe to toe with the devil and his cronies—to give and take as Fate would have it.

A missionary, whom I had rescued in later years from the devils on Vanua Lava, expressed his thanks to me, saying: "In spite of **your** sins you blackhearted scoundrels will fight your way into Kingdom Come, for you fear not even the Almighty."

No wages were paid on a prospecting trader; everybody worked on a percentage basis. It took a genius in the art of bookkeeping to figure out what was due to every man, and woe betide the unscrupulous supercargo who tried to cheat—he simply disappeared. No courts were resorted to; we recognized no laws.

Pearls found by a member of the crew were his individual property, and many a murder was committed for the possession of them. They were so easily hidden. All shells, however, went into the ship's cargo as spoils.

On the high seas we flew our own flag and scoffed at all others. I have often wondered why we were called privateers, for privateers were supposed to be com-

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missioned by some government. I suppose the name was applied to let us off gently. Take while the taking is good was the law, and may the devil take the faint-hearted.

I had my first glimpse at the traders' flag—the doubtful flag as it was called on the coast—on the third day out. We sighted a small schooner during the afternoon watch. I was on deck with the Captain and Second Mate. Judging by the way the schooner was heading, she must have been bound for Sydney, and apparently had sighted us, for she hoisted her flag.

The distance, however, was too great for me to make out the flag in detail. Captain McPurden and Mr. Johnson, however, knew what it was. Mr. Johnson went below, and coming up, he handed me a furled flag:

"Break this out," he said to me; then to the Captain: "That looks like the *Fulualea*."

Captain McPurden laughed at this, while I studied our flag with interest as it went up on the spanker peak.

"A Hell of a name for a blackbirder like Oliver to call his schooner!" he chuckled. "Now, if he had to give her a native name, why didn't he make it *Mako* or *Feke*? The niggers would believe that. But, *Sunrays*, that's the limit. Well, Oliver always had a good sense of humour."

Their conversation did not greatly interest me. It was our flag that attracted my attention—an upper and lower yellow field were divided by a horizontal black stripe, and bordered at top and bottom by a similar black stripe, with the upper field containing a swordfish and a shark, the former apparently chasing the latter, and both of them done in black.

"That's the traders' flag," the Captain told me as he caught me studying it. "We show that only on the high seas and to the niggers on the Islands but never in a coast port or to a man o' war. Savvy?"

I had been on board long enough to savvy a lot. If we had opened fire upon this schooner and boarded her it would have been no surprise to me. The schooner now altered her course and bore down on us until she was within easy hailing distance. One of the men on her afterdeck had a megaphone and shouted:

"We spied a limejuice gunlugger somewhere around latitude 29 and 157 long. Got something aboard?"

"No," was Mr. Johnson's bellowed reply. "We only got trade goods. Just out of Sydney."

The schooner went on her way again after exchanging salutes, but I started wondering what we could have on board to compel us to avoid any "gunluggers." Oh, mystery of the South Seas!

Bunk was on the main deck. He would be able to enlighten me. So I joined him and put the question to him.

"We don't want to get caught with squob aboard," was his reply as Cockney joined us.

"What do you mean by 'squob?'" I asked, more mystified than before.

"That schooner we just spoke is a blackbirder," said Bunk. "That's as good as a slaver, but now she's bound for the coast with shell or sandal-wood, or something. Got to show something when she goes to pick up trade goods and rum. Picks up native women on islands where there's plenty and trades them off where they're scarce. That's what we call squob trade. We all do it when we get a chance."

"But who makes the trade when these women go on board?" I asked. "Do they go willingly?"

"Yes; they do," Cockney put in; "they go by the will o' the chief—I say, Bunk," he suddenly branched off, sniffing the air in the manner of a terrier, "there's some-

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thing making. I don't like the looks of the way its calming down, and ain't it getting hot all of a sudden?"

This last remark he made with a glance aloft where a beating of canvas announced the end of our breeze.

It was, indeed, getting very hot. We had sailed along at a rate of about five or six knots an hour, remarkable speed considering the light breeze we'd been having. The sky had been almost cloudless but as the wind abruptly stopped, the horizon seemed to melt away and where the clearly defined line should have been the sky and water were blending in a copper-coloured mess which appeared to be drawing in closer, threatening to envelope us at an alarmingly rapid rate.

The water, as that overhead glare was reflected from its glassy surface, changed from a beautiful azure blue into an uncanny, yellowish hue and began to take on a sluggish oily appearance which in contrast to the blue sky overhead made it appear as though we were floating in a huge kettle partly filled with molten brass.

A ghastly silence seemed to have fairly engulfed the ship. It was suddenly broken by Mr. Johnson's voice which now sounded almost like the toneless croak of some half strangled beast.

"Hurricane on the way," he said with a troubled look, coming up from the cabin where he had gone to consult the barometer, "but what beats me is, that the glass ain't falling any to amount to something—it's just pumping, that's all."

Captain McPurden smiled.

"Call all hands," he ordered, "and take in all the canvas you can. That's no hurricane, Johnson; it's a white squall. You'll see something that'll make any hurricane or typhoon hide its face for shame, only it don't last long; if

it did I'd be shoveling coal long ago. Shake a leg, now, bu'lies, before we lose our sticks or turn turtle."

"But the glass," Mr. Johnson remonstrated, while all hands hustled at top speed, "it ain't low; it's only just pumping."

"When that glass falls," Captain McPurden said, with his eye to the northwest, "it'll go with a jump that'll almost knock the bottom out, and then it's too late."

I had seen some fast work done in handling sail on the clipper but the way our canvas disappeared beat everything I have ever seen before or since. They were all oldtimers and knew the danger. And it was hot. Our perspiration was actually running down the shrouds as we jumped from yard to yard, furling sail after sail. Even the cook took a hand, and the Captain called the man from the wheel to help him furl the spanker. There was no need of steering any more for we were just rolling helplessly.

The approach of the squall was a wonderful sight to behold. Few have ever witnessed anything like it. White squalls are rare, and only extend over small areas. But what they lack in extent they make up for in fury. We were right in the very centre of the white squall while it was forming. The sky overhead, a perfect blue, with the sun shining down into this cauldron, made that thick surrounding wall look like a piece of steel in which the temper is being drawn. The yellowish glare upon the water gradually blended itself into orange in the distances, which, like intangible ramparts deeper and deeper in colour, changed far off into a dark red, the red slowly fading into light purple, which finally merged with the blue sky.

But there was no time for admiring this beautiful display of colour. A small white cloud began to form in the

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sky at an angle of about thirty degrees from the horizontal, and this cloud was rapidly increasing in size.

"Now look at your glass, Mr. Johnson," the Captain said with an air of "I told you so."

The atmosphere had been so heavy that it was nearly impossible to breathe, but I now began to feel as if in a partial vacuum—as if the ship beneath our feet were actually rising.

The Captain seemed to read my thoughts as I looked at him bewildered, with a question almost on my lips.

"She has gone up all right," said he; "the water is lifting us. We're about fifty or more feet higher than we were a minute ago."

Mr. Johnson had again gone below to look at the glass. He came running up much alarmed.

"Holy catfish!" he exclaimed; "I never seen her that low. She's down to 27.9 and keeps on going down."

"Better stay on deck and watch the show," Mr. Kennedy said. "The glass won't tell you much more."

All eyes were fixed upon the white cloud which looked like an enormous snowball in the sky, thrown toward us by an unseen giant's hand.

The centre of this cloud now seemed to be advancing faster than its rim until it looked like the spout of a gigantic funnel pointed toward us with its open nozzle ready to pour forth destruction. Possibly my imagination may have deceived me, but I really thought that I saw blue sky through it.

But there was no more time to study developments. In an instant we were enveloped in darkness. Just as I heard Captain McPurden say, "That's the grandad of the Typhoon," it broke.

I felt as if we were going up, up into the sky, straight through the clouds. I had been facing aft but the ship

seemed to twist itself around, right under my feet. The starboard braces tightened with a twang. Water came in showers on deck. But it was not rain. It was salt water. It came up all around us. My cap went into the air. My shirt went over my head into ribbons. My trousers slid up on my legs as I held on to the pump handle—everything seemed to go up around me. I laughed as the thought struck me, how a woman would fare in this.

Pandemonium had broken loose. Fish dropped on the deck, their stomachs burst open. Others went by, upward, in a wall of water that seemed to top our masts by hundreds of feet. The bow went up into the air. The deck pointed at an angle of forty-five degrees. Then down went the bow and up came the stern. The noise was deafening—it sounded like water rushing through a restricted channel in thunderous rapids but thousands of times as loud. There was nothing in sight but water going up on one side of us and coming down on the other, right over our tops.

Something went sliding by me and grabbed me around the knees. It was Cockney. I held on to the pump handle but it broke and down we slid together into the lee scuppers as the ship lay over almost on her beam ends while a tremendous crash in the galley announced the going adrift of the stove and the smashing of pots.

An avalanche of water came over the weather rail—then a fiendish shrieking of wind through the rigging—like howls and yells from all the demons of the inferno. Then we slowly righted ourselves and rolled heavily in a dead calm, shipping water alternately over both rails with every roll while the waterspout disappeared at tremendous speed in the hazy darkness, like a murderer hastening away from the scene of his crime.

But that had been only the beginning.

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"There's more coming," Captain McPurden shouted, steadying himself at the mizzen mast. "Hold on wherever you are."

No sooner had he spoken than an enormous gust of wind struck us. On our beam ends we went again, and then it did blow. We were simply sliding sideways with our bare rigging listing down at an angle of less than forty degrees—how far we were sliding it would be impossible to tell.

Water was coming on deck in sheets. One minute it was salt, the next fresh, like rain-water. The drops felt like hailstones, they were thrown with such force. But there was hope—it was getting lighter.

It blew so hard that the waves were shattered as soon as they left the surface—they were atomized. The spray was so thick that it felt like solid water, driving along tons and tons of gravel and making breathing nearly impossible. It was like being drowned in the open air.

There was nothing to do but to hold on and wait. To let go would have meant sure death, for everything that was loose went overboard. The air was just a solid mass of driving rain and saltwater spray. To face the wind would have meant blindness and strangulation. The water was thrown with sufficient force to knock the eyes out of our heads or to fill our lungs through the nostrils.

Time could not be kept track of. It might have been fifteen or twenty minutes or more before there was any sign of a let-up. Then rapidly the darkness began to abate and with one more final heave, which almost completely laid us on our beam ends, the wind stopped as abruptly as it had come, and as the ship righted herself we could see the rain sweep down to leeward like a sky-high, slanting wall of water.

It was dead calm again but the sea was now beginning

to rise, and we were rolling like a pendulum with huge combers boarding us and threatening to sweep everything over the sides. The deck was a sight—halyards, braces and clew-lines were in a hopeless tangle. Buckets were gone from their racks but none of the boats had been torn from their lashings nor any of the sails whipped from their gaskets.

Everybody was accounted for; not a man had been injured with the exception of a few bruises. It seemed marvelous. Fate surely had smiled upon us. We had gone through the worst of dangers, a giant waterspout, forming in the very eye of a white squall—one of the rarest and most dreaded atmospheric phenomena of the South Seas.

Typhoons are supposed to blow at the rate of three hundred miles an hour, but what is a typhoon compared to a white squall? I have lived through both and can say there is no comparison.

But even this squall had blown some good for I now discovered a philosopher. Captain McPurden viewed the deck from the cabin top. He scratched his head while an amused expression spread over his face.

"Well," he exploded, "we needed a deck-washing and we sure got it. Come up on deck, Guernsey. It's over. Splice the main brace. We're all here and ready to make sail again."

CHAPTER IV

RUM

WHILE we were clearing the deck after the squall and making sail to check the terrific rolling nice breeze came up from the southeast, and by the time the topgallants were set it had so increased in strength that we had about all the canvas on that we could carry. I had been wishing for this. To see a ship that could glide so easily under a mere breath of wind, in a good, stiff breeze was my heart's desire and now it was fulfilled. She certainly could sail. As if scoffing at this last display of nature's temper, she forged her way through the enraged seas unmindful of their vicious slaps, and as I watched the foaming wake astern I was proud to be a trader.

It was time to relieve the wheel, and, light-hearted and carefree, I started to do so.

"Taint your turn," the man at the wheel said.

But without my knowing it, the Captain had observed my movements.

"All right—let him take her," he ordered. He had been pacing the quarterdeck with the two mates, but as soon as I took the wheel he came aft, and stationing himself beside the binnacle, he watched the compass, without a word, for about twenty minutes. Suddenly he spoke:

"How long have you been going to sea?"

"About eight months," I answered.

"The clipper your first ship?"

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"Yes, sir."

"You steer pretty good, but don't let that swell your head. Like it better here than on the clipper?"

"Yes, sir."

"I thought so. You like the free and easy devil-may-care. I knew that the first time I saw you. The squall scared Guernsey stiff. It didn't seem to scare you. How did you get on board the clipper?"

"I ran away from school—came on board as a stow-away, sir." Honesty seemed the best policy in the presence of this mind reader.

"I thought so," he came right back. "Come from good family, sea-going ancestry, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"I know the whole story without you telling me. Had you all numbered and tagged when I saw you in Dave's. How old are you, anyway?"

Here I thought it best not to be truthful, so I gave my age as fifteen, and I could see that he really believed me.

"I noticed that you liked your liquor pretty well for a boy of your age," he resumed. "How did you get the taste?" Without giving me a chance to reply he went right on: "Rum and women! Watch out for them; they get every good sailor. If they don't get you, you are better off on a farm. The Islands, when they get into your bones. . . ." He looked at me. "Boy, they are already in your bones," he said harshly. "The rum has you, too. Next come the women. Just a year or two and you'll be going full before the wind. Rocks ahead, boy! Rocks ahead!"

Not understanding what he meant by this last remark, I thought he actually saw danger ahead, and swinging the wheel hard over I ran the *Emma P.* up into the wind with all sails backing.

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This operation to a square-rigger is liable to prove disastrous, but fortunately our stays were new and none of our rigging carried away.

Quick as a flash the Captain had the wheel, and swinging her hard-a-lee brought her back on the quartering wind before she lost headway.

"My fault," he shouted to the mate who came running aft, cursing, and then, as if there had been no interruption, he resumed his monologue: "Yes, boy; rocks ahead for you but not for the ship. Here, take the wheel now. There is Bunk for'd, for instance, sailed with me, now going on two years—good sailor—but what could he been if it hadn't been for rum and women? Statesman, maybe. Educated at Oxford—know that? Yes; might have been governor or something in Australia. Old story: football hero—women smiled at him—then rum—rum. Now the Islands. Woman, rum and the Islands—these three, but the worst of them is the first, and that is woman."

Silently he shook his head; then he spoke again:

"And there is Cockney, your other bally. He was a coming light-weight champion. Seen him in three of his fights. Knocked 'em out as fast as they came. Engaged to a girl—got his nose broken fighting for her—licked three at a time. Then she threw him down—didn't like his nose. And then—" Silently he spread his hands in a gesture of utter resignation, and went below.

During this moody outbreak from the Captain, the Mate and Second Mate had been pacing the quarterdeck near the taffrail. Now they came aft, grinning.

"Well, kid, think you'll remember your Sunday-school lesson?" mocked the Mate. "When he comes up again, with his belly full of holy spirit, he'll preach you a sermon."

"And, then," added the Second Mate, as if the prospect

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pleased him; "he'll have his holy communion, and then he'll spit hellfire and brimstone."

Both of them resumed their deck-pacing, laughing to themselves.

A few minutes later the Mate sang out for the relief at the wheel, but just as I was handing the wheel over, and the man who was to take my place repeated the course which I gave him, the Captain's head appeared above the after companion-way. His expression was sad as though he was about to cry.

"Hold her for another trick, boy," he said. "I want to talk to you"; and as the man who was to relieve me disappeared, he came on deck, staggering a little. He seated himself on the cabin top, facing me, and began:

"Yes, son; we are a hard lot. We are traders. Know what we like best to trade for?"

I did not and replied to that effect.

"Pearls," he said. "Pearls—and what good are they? People say pearls bring tears and sorrow—and they do. They bring tears and sorrow to the women of the diver who gets nabbed by a shark—most of them do sooner or later. Then come the traders. We think we get them for next to nothing. Last trip I traded in a pearl worth a thousand pounds—cost me about three pounds in trade goods, cheap trash what the niggers like. They think they stick us and we think we stick them, but we don't get pearls cheap—cost too many lives.

"Lost fourteen men last trip in fights with the natives. Tough men they were—came from the Island, and I guess nobody cried because they were killed. But sometime back, before they came to the Islands, someone must have cried—mother—girl—sister—who knows? Lots of us get lost. There's danger everywhere, any place we go; and when we've made a good trip and we are on our way to

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the coast with a lot of loot to cash in we got to watch for pirates. Oh, yes; you needn't look surprised! There's pirates in these waters. We can stand our ground with them all right if there ain't too many of them; but when there's a fight, some of us may go to Davy Jones—it may be you; can't tell. Or, maybe, a squall, like the one we had—if it hits you when you ain't looking, you are gone. No chance of getting picked up here, not enough ships around. There's more tears for you—if someone cares.

"Yes; that's what pearls will do, and who wants them? Women! They want men to die and starve and suffer to get them. Why shouldn't they cry for them?"

He was silent for a while, drumming his heels against the cabin-side; then he spoke again:

"Son, there is a woman crying about you now—your mother. You ran away from school, wild boy. Should have stayed there. Some day you'll be sorry, then it's too late. Some day you may have your own ship and trade for yourself. You'll get lots of pearls—but they won't go to your mother. Hope she won't need them. They'll go to other women who'll smile them away from you. No; you can't hold back on women—you're too much of a sailor. Oh, I saw you all right in Dave's! The way you handled that cutlass I could see what stuff you was made of. You'll stand up to men but you can't stand up to women—that's your weak side. I can tell. In a few years you'll find out that I was right."

He sat there thinking for a while and then he slid off the cabin top and went down the companionway, leaving me alone with the compass and my thoughts.

Mechanically I kept the *Emma P.* on her course, and resolved that whatever he had said I would do my best to outwit this oracle. But years afterwards, many times while pacing the quarterdeck of my own barkentine

Glenora, I thought of him as a man who had predicted my future.

It is generally understood by laymen that sailors work and rest in alternate four-hour watches, the crew being divided into two gangs, one called the starboard watch, the other the port watch. The starboard watch is the Captain's watch, with the Second Mate as second in command, while the port watch is under the command of the First Mate. Vessels under one thousand tons rarely carried a third mate, although in stories we often read about a third mate on board a small schooner. I have sailed on board a four-hundred ton brigantine which carried only one mate.

If the watches were run on the four-hours-off and four-hours-on basis, the same gang would always be on deck during the same hours of the day. In other words, if the starboard watch were on deck from eight to twelve a. m. on one day, they would be on deck at that time every day. To avoid this and give the men a fair turn, a change of watches takes place each afternoon. This is accomplished by two systems, called by sailors "English watch" and "Dutch watch." Under English watch the whole crew is kept on deck from twelve to four p. m., then one watch goes below while the other stays on deck until eight p. m. Thus each watch is doing one eight hour shift every twenty four hours, which results in a turn about every day. With the Dutch watch the turn about is accomplished by dividing the four to eight p. m. watch into two shifts, from four to six and from six to eight.

On board of the *Emma P.* we stood English watch, of course, as is customary on board of English and Nova Scotia vessels. This brought me on deck watch again at eight o'clock.

The wind had not subsided a bit, and with the top-

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gallants we were carrying about as much sail as any sane man would dare. There is such a thing as checking your headway by carrying too much sail, as the excessive list of the vessel will cause her to "spill" the wind, besides subjecting both hull and rigging to unnecessary strain.

The Captain came on deck shortly after eight. What a change there was in him! He looked no longer like the carefree sea rover, or the fatherly, advice-giving philosopher. He looked more like a wild man. Bareheaded, his shirt-front open, with one foot clad in a sea boot the other bare—apparently he had been taking his "holy communion."

"Mister," he ironically greeted the Second Mate, just as Mr. Kennedy went down the forward companionway, "if my officers have not enough guts to carry sail, I'll have to take charge myself. We are drifting. Why in Hell don't you give her the royals. Hey, you!" he bel-lowed at me in almost the same breath, "lay aloft now and unfurl those royals, shake a leg now—and I want all hands on deck."

By the time I had reached the main sheerpole, jumping aloft in bewilderment at this sudden change, a belaying pin came whizzing by my head and went overboard with a splash. Lucky for me that his aim was bad, as a second one struck the shrouds with a bang just as I reached the main top.

Cockney, who had been standing near the fore-rigging was aloft in a jiffy and reached the fore royal yard almost as quick as I had reached the main and by the time both royals were unfurled, I heard the command to sheet home.

Then I saw that in my haste I had forgotten to coil the port gasket and went out upon the yard-arm again to do this, when I heard the Captain's voice:

"Hoist away there lively now, you swellheads."

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Up went the royal yard with me in the foot rope down in lee, and crash it snapped in two at the parrel before it was to blocks.

Unprepared for such a severe shock I slipped off the foot rope, still clutching the end of the gasket—which luckily held—and swung in midair, striking the upper topsail yard-arm at every roll and pitch of the vessel.

Trying to save myself, I reached for the topgallant sheet chain with my left hand but my arm slipped between the chain and the yard, and the next heave wrenched it so badly that I thought it was broken. My left hand was now useless, and the racking pain almost caused me to let go my hold. Still I clung to the gasket with my right but it was impossible to climb with one hand. It was only a matter of minutes before my strength would give out, and I would plunge to certain death.

I saw two men leap for the main shrouds, evidently to assist me, but the Captain had drawn his gun, and in his crazed condition fired a shot past them shouting:

“Lay off there! Let him hang there or get down the best he can, or go overboard. He had no business on the yard-arm after we started hoisting.”

The First Mate, who had again returned to the deck, and apparently was infuriated at the Captain’s remark about his sailing qualifications, challenged him.

“To Hell with you and your royals in a topsail breeze,” he called back at him in anger and contempt, and started up the rigging with the Captain firing shot after shot at him.

Coming out on to the upper topsail yard-arm he yelled at me:

“Let go when I grab your feet.”

It seemed as if I swung there a lifetime before I felt his grip on my ankles and let go of the gasket, my last

ounce of strength almost spent.

To go overboard then would have meant sure death, as the Captain in his madness would have made no attempt to save his own brother at that time.

The main royal on its broken yard was meanwhile flapping itself into shreds, but no more attention was paid to it.

Due to the extra pressure of the fore royal, which stood, the vessel was listing with the port rail more than awash, which made it difficult to obtain a footing anywhere, and by the time we gained the deck the crew was in a mutinous state of mind. There was good reason for their dissatisfaction. Not only were the watch below robbed of their rest, but we were making less headway besides, and the unnecessary carrying away of any of the gear aloft meant work which could as well be avoided.

"We ain't going to stand for this kind of sailing," one of them challenged the Second Mate. That officer, now also in an ugly mood, struck at him with his fist. But the man was too quick for him and the next instant both of them were rolling over and over in the lee scuppers.

Here and now, through no particular personal grudges, had come a general opportunity for an outlet of pent-up wrath and discontent.

Another man grabbed a belaying pin, and striking the Second Mate over the head, knocked him senseless. The rest of them, intent upon forestalling any interference, piled on to the Captain and First Mate almost as soon as the latter had reached the main deck. The onslaught was too much for them, and down they went under an avalanche of squirming humanity.

In spite of my injured arm, though unable to understand the reason for these hostilities, I tried to take a hand in the mêlée, remembering that I belonged to the quarter-

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deck, but Bunk seized me around the waist, and forcing my back against the pin rail, said:

"Easy now, boy; they only want their rum—there won't be much to it."

Three of the men had disengaged themselves from the fracas and made a dash for the forward companionway, knocking down the cook and Mr. Guerny who were trying to block their way. They forced the pantry door and soon reappeared with their arms full of bottles.

"If we are going to Hell, we'll go cracked," one of them shouted, emptying one of the bottles almost at a gulp. Then the three of them, reaching the main deck at a bound, were in the mixup again, with half a dozen hands reaching for and seizing the bottles, and for the next half hour there was such a turmoil of blows, oaths and bottle-breaking that it was impossible to tell who was on top.

It was simply a free for all fight. Men whose business was fighting savages fought among themselves because there was no one else to fight against. In the darkness no one knew whom he struck. A man would disengage himself long enough to place a bottle to his lips, only to be knocked down and have the bottle snatched from him by someone else. The more the battle progressed the crazier the combatants were getting, with the rum determined to obtain the final decision.

I struggled to free myself from Bunk's embrace, but what could I do with only one good arm against a powerful fellow like him? Suddenly I saw a hand clutching an empty bottle reach out of the mixup. Crash, it came down upon my head, and down I went.

How long I was unconscious I do not know, but when I finally came to I found myself awash in the waterways down in the lee. My face was covered with blood from a gash in my scalp.

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I could hardly make out where I was, when a crash up aloft followed by an uproar of tearing, beating canvas brought me to my senses. The fore royal yard had broken and the sail was now flapping to shreds.

The fight was over. In the moonlight I could see the men lying all over the deck, their heads and faces bleeding, broken glass everywhere.

The Captain was sitting upright, with one hand holding himself on the poop ladder rail stanchion, with the other wiping blood from his eyes. The ghastly sight reminded me of a story I had read about a phantom ship.

I staggered to my feet, and stumbled to the poop ladder where the Captain was sitting. He stared at me like a man in a trance.

"Boy, what happened?" His voice was calm; he seemed perfectly sober.

Wiping his eyes again, he shook his head and grumbled:

"Those swines!—now see what the rum will do. Where are the mates? Who has the wheel?"

I could not reply to any of his questions. I simply stood there swaying and staring like a drunken man.

He dragged himself upright and went up the poop ladder, I following him. The mates were nowhere about. The cook was steering, but the Captain paid no attention to him; he looked aloft and sighed.

"Both royals gone," he said. "How in Hell did this all happen? I'll go below and find Guernsey. He will have to lend a hand now. You go and look for the mates."

Looking around the deck, I stumbled over the Second Mate's body at the foot of the port poop ladder, but no amount of shaking had any effect upon him. He was lying face down with his left hand at his throat.

I turned him over, and then cold perspiration broke out all over me at the horrible sight. His left hand was

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clutching a bottle, the broken neck of which had pierced his throat. Now, as if snatched from the wound by that limp hand, it dropped on deck, and as it rolled down toward the scuppers, something was pouring out of it.

I did not stop to investigate what it was. It made me shudder. Was this murder? Or had he fallen upon the bottle after being knocked down in the skirmish? I ran down into the cabin and reported my horrible discovery to the Captain, who was at work trying to revive Mr. Guerney, for even the peace-loving supercargo was knocked out.

Together we went to the main deck and started to drag the Second Mate's body into the cabin, but I was of little help to the Captain with only one useful arm.

While thus engaged, we found Mr. Kennedy lying near the main mast in a semi-conscious state, and after considerable labour we managed to place both men in their respective bunks. They were big men, and dragging a limp human body up a narrow poop ladder and down a narrow companionway on board of a rolling, pitching and tossing vessel is no easy task.

There was no question about Mr. Johnson's condition. He was done for, but after examining Mr. Kennedy the Captain felt somewhat relieved.

"He ain't hurt much," he consoled; "he'll be all right in a day or two. You better go and take the wheel now and let the cook come down and help me bandage up his head. Guerney is down and out, too."

"My left arm is out of joint," I answered. "I won't be able to hold the wheel."

"Nice mess," he grumbled, examining my arm which apparently was dislocated at the elbow. "Stay here till I come back."

He disappeared up the companionway, and coming

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back a few minutes later, followed by the cook, he said:

"I've lashed the wheel. Now we'll put your arm in shape so you'll be of some use."

Neither the Captain nor the cook had much surgical experience, but after much pulling and twisting, which was anything but pleasant, they finally succeeded in getting my arm back into its socket. While the cook was dressing our scalp wounds, Mr. Kennedy regained consciousness. He raised himself on one elbow, and dazedly inquired:

"What happened? Where is Johnson?"

"Johnson's ready to meet Davy Jones," was the Captain's solemn reply. "Don't know how it started, but the whole crew are scattered all over the deck, drunk and knocked out. Don't try to get up now—you came pretty near your finish, too." And then to Mr. Guerney, who was reclining in a deck chair, where he had placed him, after bandaging up his head, "You better get into your bunk now," he said almost contemptuously. "You ain't much use when you are well, let alone when you're messed up."

A clattering and beating of canvas suddenly informed us that the ship had run up into the wind. With a groan Mr. Kennedy's head dropped back on his pillow, as the Captain rushed up the companionway followed by the cook and me. He reached the wheel in time to swing her off the wind, and turned the wheel over to the cook.

"It can't be helped," he reasoned; "you'll have to take the wheel now till I get a chance to relieve you for a while, and you," he said to me, "get for'ard on the lookout. We are getting in bad waters now, and no crew. Never mind that bunch on deck. Leave them as they are."

"Keep a sharp lookout," he called after me as I started for'ard. "Sing out anything you see."

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Going along the main deck, I noticed that none of the crew had stirred. Bunk was lying with his head on the main hatch; I recognized none of the others. Would some of them never wake again? Morning would tell. Oh, if only daylight would come!—the moonlight gave the whole scene such a gruesome aspect. But then it was only a little past eleven at night—a night of horror with Death as a shipmate.

I went on to the fo'c'slehead and sat down on the capstan. My head ached. The scalp wound, which the bottle had made, throbbed like a trip hammer. My left arm was numb, and trying to work my fingers, I found that they would not respond to my efforts.

All sorts of thoughts whirled through my brain. I had been in a bloody fight, a fight in which Death had taken a hand. How different from the ordinary rough and tumble! One man was dead, aft in his berth—how many more, only morning would tell. Did I have a part in the killing?—Oh, if I could only talk to someone to break this maddening silence!

Tomorrow at least one man would be consigned to an unmarked grave. Would he reach the bottom? Or would his body be floating at some unknown depth for ages?

Then there were sharks and other marine monsters. Would he be devoured by one of them?

The Captain's words of a few hours ago again rang in my ears: "There is a woman crying about you now." Yes, it would be daytime now at home, but had they any idea that I was on board of an outlaw ship—the nearest to a pirate that could be imagined?

With these thoughts torturing my mind I looked ahead into the moonlit night.

What an air of mystery seemed to hang over this out of the way part of the world! The ocean appeared to me

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more deserted than it had when running down the trade winds in the Atlantic on board of the clipper—deathly silent, although we were under topgallants in a topsail breeze.

Have you ever sailed at night in uncharted waters, staring ahead into the darkness, always expecting something to crop up before you, continually looking for unknown dangers? Have you ever sailed on board of a ship where men considered fighting a pastime, and fought to kill? Where human life was considered simply as tools of the trade? Only with this experience behind you, could you imagine the feeling that came over me, sitting there alone at night on the capstan of this death ship.

Something far ahead on the port bow attracted my attention. At a distance of about four or five miles away the sea seemed different; it appeared to be disturbed as if by breakers on a beach.

I looked more sharply. It did seem that something was wrong with the water there, and, turning aft, I sang out:

“Breakers ahead on port bow.”

Somebody came running forward. It was the Captain.

“Are you dreaming? Where?” he asked with anxiety.

I pointed in the direction where the disturbance was plainly visible, and nodding his head he said:

“That must be the Elizabeth reef. I hope it is not the Middleton. If so we would pass between them, and Lord knows what’s liable to be there. Any ship that runs afoul of those reefs hasn’t a chance. It’s hundreds of miles from anywhere. Tomorrow I’ll have to take an observation—we sure have sailed.”

Then he started to explain.

“Those reefs are said to be of coral formation. A few miles away from them the water is about a mile or two

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deep. Anything that's alive in the sea will congregate around those reefs—sharks by the hundreds. A man would no sooner touch the water than he'd be gobbled up. We're in bad waters now. Keep your eyes open."

He was silent for a minute, then he added:

"I've looked the men over; it's mostly the rum that's got them down, but two of them—well, we'll have three funerals tomorrow."

With this remark he went aft again to abandon me to new thoughts of horror.

CHAPTER V

THE CURSE OF THE PEARLS

THREE days out, three men on the dead man's chest. What a life! If this wind keeps up we'll make the Island in about a week. But the wind will not last in these waters. It will soon calm down. Will the crew last?

Why should not your pearls bring tears and sorrow? Each bead in your necklace may mean a human life. . . .

I had to keep a sharp lookout. We were in bad waters, the Captain had said. It did look bad there over the port bow, but there was no danger of my falling asleep with my whole body aching, and my mind torturing me with such thoughts.

Tomorrow there will be three men going down to an unmarked grave. What day is tomorrow? We sailed Thursday morning. This is the night of the third day out—tomorrow will be my first Sunday as a trader. Was this an omen?

In the story, Robinson Crusoe ran away from home, left his parents to their heartache to go to sea, and was punished by being marooned on a lonely island for years, somewhere in this very ocean.

I looked astern; there seemed to be no life anywhere on board, no lights. Not even the friendly, soft glow of the running lights. No laws were observed in these waters. Who'd know the difference? Who'd enforce them? Who'd be benefited by them?

Silence everywhere. Only the gurgling of the water

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past our bows. And now, plainly audible in the distance, the roar of the breakers on Elizabeth reef, or was it the Middleton? Let it be, let us run afoul, then it soon will be over. The angel of vengeance must be hovering over the South Pacific. The sooner he strikes the better But he did not strike. We sailed past the reefs. The breakers seemed to roar: "There is more to come for you—beware!"

* * * * *

At last—after ages of agony—a faint glow in the eastern sky, and then almost at once, daylight and the sun. I shaded my eyes against the fierce glare, for in these tropical seas there is no beautiful sunrise; first blood-chilling darkness, and then merciless heat.

I heard a voice close behind me. It was the cook's. But it came to me more like the voice of Providence. He spoke almost in a whisper:

"Come aft now and get your coffee. Then you'll have to get out palm and needle and canvas. We've got to get to work."

Palm and needle and canvas. I knew only too well what that meant. It was not for patching the ripped royals; they were gone beyond repair. Oh, I could have jumped overboard then to escape the torture of the ghastly work!

Going along the main deck, I kept my eyes aloft. I did not wish to see until necessary.

The broken royal yards were swinging drunkenly. That fateful gasket was lashing in the wind, way up there in the main rigging. Why had not my strength given out then? That would not have been suicide. If my foot were to strike anything soft now, that would mean madness!

In the cabin Mr. Kennedy was sitting at the table sup-

porting his head with his hands. He did not look up as I entered. He seemed not to notice anything. Thank God! the door to the Second Mate's room was closed, otherwise I would not have been able to obtain the stimulating effect of the coffee, which the cook very wisely had made extra strong.

I was hungry, but it seemed impossible to eat the hard-tack. They used to use bonemeal in the preparation of some grades of hardtack—dead men's bones, the cook on board of the clipper once jokingly told me. The thought of it was revolting—I had had enough of dead men.

Without a word I gulped down three cups of black coffee, then went into the lazaret to get the necessary material. In their racks rested the rifles, pistols and cutlasses. The sight of them now sent a chill down my spine. It seemed ages ago since I had last seen them, regarded them from a different viewpoint.

I felt my knees shaking as I got out the canvas. I wanted to linger, to delay as long as possible, but what good would it do? There was no way out; it had to be done, and whipping my shattered nerves into action, I hurried through my task.

The Captain was steering when I appeared on the quarterdeck. He called me aft.

"Here," he said, extending a bottle. "Take a good swig at this before you start in. You'll need it. You look like a ghost."

He held the bottle by the neck, and placed it in my hand. When his fingers released it, I stared at it horrified—the neck of the bottle was broken!

There is something sinister about the task of sewing a dead man up in canvas. The cook and I had to perform this gruesome work alone, as Mr. Kennedy was in no condition to do anything; he had lived through it, but that

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was about all. Three days passed before he could resume his duties again.

Bunk, Cockney and one of the other men had come to, but they were of no help. They tried to avoid looking at their dead shipmates, but they used what little ambition they had in dragging the others forward—there were five of them still unconscious—and throwing the broken bottles overboard.

After we had the Second Mate laid out, I went down to the main deck to prepare the other bodies, while the cook looked for some broken oars to be lashed to the canvas caskets and thus hold them rigid. Turning over the first man, I saw that he had been stabbed to the heart. The knife still stuck there to the hilt—it was Bunk's knife. I withdrew the weapon and hid it inside of my shirt. Bunk had knifed him, but no one else should know to revenge him. This was the fellow who had struck me down with the bottle, but why—what had I done to him? I had known him to be a surly individual, always hanging back, and once, when the Second Mate had flung him toward the rail when he tried to shirk work aloft, I had seen him clench his fist, and heard him mutter under his breath:

“You'll get yours the first chance.”

That was it. He had known that I had heard him then, and that foul blow with the bottle meant, “Dead men tell no tales.”

Did he drive the neck of the broken bottle through the Second Mate's throat? Would the Captain hold an inquest after the funerals? Whatever was to happen, I must shield Bunk. He was my friend, he with the ugly, repulsive features. When, months afterwards, I heard his life's story from his own lips, I loved him.

The other man's head had been crushed from the blow

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of an iron belaying pin. It was a terrible sight.

When the bodies were ready for burial they were placed side by side upon the quarterdeck and covered with the traders' flag. That much respect, at least, was accorded the dead. All sails were now clewed up—a hard task for this handful of derelicts—and the ship brought up into the wind.

Mr. Kennedy, weak as he was, insisted on coming on deck supported by the cook, but he had to lean upon the taffrail. The true Irishman within him would not permit him to ignore those solemn rites.

We lined up along the rail, and then I counted, one, two, four dorsal fins, slowly cutting the water, circling about alongside of us. What a gruesome colour their presence casts over scenes like this! What strange power makes them aware of the event about to happen?

"Did you plumb them well?" gravely asked the Captain of the cook.

I thought I detected a shudder when his eyes beheld those living graves near the surface.

"Yes, sir, they each got about sixty pounds of old iron," came the quavering reply from the visibly shaking cook.

"Ready then."

The cook took hold of the ends of the old oars on the first body and slowly slid it from under the flag over the side.

There were no prayers. Silence. Not a word spoken until the third body splashed overboard, then solemnly came the Captain's voice:

"Three more curses upon the pearls, and still the women wear them."

The trader's curse was on the pearls which he carried to civilization. The curse of the pearls was on the trader.

Without another word the Captain walked over to the

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companionway. He took out his knife and made three marks in the slide—one cross mark and two straight—one officer and two men.

It was now ten a. m. He brought up his sextant and took his observation after instructing me how to mark the chronometer time.

After we had brought the ship under way again, the cook appeared on deck with the bottle. Bunk was now able to take the wheel. The Captain walked up to the cook.

"After this we splice the main brace at the relief of each watch," he said.

I went to the companionway and counted the marks. There were now twenty-three. Two of them were cross marks.

There was no inquest, only the entry in the log—lost at sea—then the latitude and longitude and date, and their names.

No one would miss them, no one cry about them. Those who knew them, who were dear to them, had long since given them up as lost. My turn will come, and then it will be the same. . . .

For several minutes I stood there staring at these marks. I stood there like one in a dream. . . . Then the Captain's voice close behind me brought me to.

"Boy," he said, patting me on the shoulder; "you are the youngest Second Mate I have ever seen in all my sea-going days." Then he walked aft, abandoning me to my astonishment at his irony in announcing my reward for standing by him without signs of complaint. I had stood the ultimate test to prove a trader.

I was not yet fourteen by several months—Second Mate on board a trader, a lawless ship.

In after years, when traders began to be more human

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and I had my own *Glenora*, I often attended social functions in Sydney and Melbourne. I was introduced to ladies and gentlemen of refinement and I tried to make friends—money was no object to the trader, we could afford to spend freely. Then someone would take an acquaintance aside and whisper: "He sailed under the doubtful flag." Enough. I was an outcast.

That flag has long since disappeared from the sea, few remember it today, but I was branded with it in more ways than one. It is tattooed on my left forearm.

The traders' curse was upon the pearls, the curse of the pearls upon the trader. It shrouded his memory in the tears of mothers, wives, sisters and sweethearts. . . .

I should have felt elated over this unexpected premature promotion, but, strange to say, I did not. I thought of the man whom I had replaced.

What kind of mate would I be? Would I soon be hardened to crime and bloodshed? Would I take advantage of the ignorance of the natives in trading? Would I, too, deal in that outlawed cargo called squob?

No! the better man in me replied—and yet. . . .

The story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde tells us that we have two distinct natures, always fighting each other, each trying to take possession of the soul and govern the actions of the body. The stronger of the two must win—but which was the stronger in me? I was too young to know. There was Dr. Jekyll pacing the weather side of the poop. Last night that same shell had encased Mr. Hyde. How long would Dr. Jekyll live before Mr. Hyde completely did away with him?

At that time Stevenson's remarkable story had not yet been written, but I clearly recognized opposing forces within me.

My thoughts were interrupted by the Captain's voice:

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"Mister," he said—there was no irony in his tone as he addressed me as an officer—"I will leave the deck to you. I have to take a rest. Your course is good for a couple of watches. You will have to keep the deck through Mr. Kennedy's watch—he's in bad shape yet. Get those royal yards down as soon as you can get the men. They will drive me crazy if they stay up there much longer."

He disappeared below. I was in charge of a ship. A week ago I had been a boy before the mast on board of a Yankee clipper, taking orders from everybody. . . . After all, it was not so bad, this trader's life, where no laws dictated, where the law was self-preservation, the survival of the fittest.

Eleven o'clock. I went aft and struck six bells, then to the forward poop taffrail and called out:

"Relieve the wheel!"

There was an argument between Cockney and the other man.

"It's your turn," Cockney told him; "go on now."

"I ain't going to take orders from no kid," was the surly reply.

What could a boy, with an arm in a sling, do in a case like that? I did not waste time.

I went below and brought up the pistol from my bunk. Pointing it at this mutinous individual, I said quietly:

"Relieve the wheel."

He obeyed orders without another protest—nevertheless I would keep my eye on this fellow.

As Bunk, upon being relieved, passed the forward end of the poop, I stepped in front of him, and pulling his knife from under my shirt, I handed it to him unseen by anyone else. He was startled and opened his mouth, but before he could speak, I said:

"It's all right, Bunk; I understand. Right after dinner

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try to get as many of the men on their feet as you can and we will take the royal gear down."

"All right, sir," he replied, and was about to go forward, but I stopped him, and in a half whisper said, "Bunk, when we are alone leave out the 'sir,' and that goes for Cockney, too."

He gripped my hand and said:

"We'll stand by you through Hell. Some day I am going to tell you a story." Then he went forward.

The hour passed quickly. I struck eight bells and again called for the relief of the wheel. I thought that Cockney would turn up, but instead one of the other men, who had come to, went aft. He was a sight to behold. His head was bandaged so as to expose only one eye, his nose and mouth.

He went to his task quite willingly; but while steering he kept raising one hand to his forehead in a manner that suggested the effects of the morning after. I thought of the old saying, "Take a bite at the dog that bit you," and felt inclined to offer him a drink, but that would have been violating the discipline of the quarterdeck. In spite of my experiences I had not learned that there was little or no discipline on board of a trader. There was not much difference between officer and seaman.

But there were two ways of handling a crew: The way of the driver and the way of the officer who through humanity and tact obtained their good will. Some men responded only to driving, but then and later I found that the majority appreciated a good turn.

It was out of the question for me to be a driver as yet, so I thought of a plan to win the good graces of the sufferer at the wheel. Taking a bottle from the pantry, I set it behind the poop ladder, and stepping up to the wheel, I said:

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"Jim, let me hold the wheel. Take a look to see if a bottle hasn't been dropped behind the poop ladder. If you find one see what's in it and bring it aft."

He understood, and soon brought the bottle aft, smiling.

"Gee, I feel better now," he said, and resumed his steering.

Taking down the royal gear turned out to be a much easier task than I had anticipated with a battered crew. The men seemed to go at it as if they enjoyed it, which was quite unusual on board the *Emma P.*

In the middle of this hustling I received the surprise of my life. The fellow, whom I had ordered to the wheel at the point of the gun, took hold of me by the arm just as I passed him and blurted out:

"Say, the old man'll be makin' you skipper of this packet if we can help it. 'Cause us stands fer a feller wot's on the square."

So that was it—a little human treatment, a kind act, and the beast would feed out of your hand.

The western plains are referred to as "The great open spaces where men are men." I have never been on them, so cannot judge as to the truth of that, but I belong to greater spaces—where men are beasts. There I am able to judge. My verdict is: The beasts have hearts. The sea is clean; the land pollutes it.

It was obvious to me now. I had gained the good will of the crew. A drink of rum to a man who needed it had done the trick. They worked hard. They intended to show the Captain and Mate that the deck could be safely left to me. How elated I felt! A man is indeed sunk low in the mire if a little act of kindness does not awaken some human feeling in him.

How well this was demonstrated to me in years to come!—when I had joined the Bullies, that band formed

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by the traders and beach-combers to fight against Malay pirates, but which itself had degenerated to piracy.

It had been decided by that lawless band to attack and plunder a yacht which had unwisely anchored off the coast of disreputable Rennell Island. I was selected to reconnoitre and see what means of defense they had. But instead a kindly smile from one of the ladies on board won me over so that I fought in their defense against my own cronies. They never knew on board of the yacht that it was the kindly power of a woman's smile that had saved them. But that belongs in another pigeonhole of my memory.

By the time the Captain came on deck—about six o'clock—everything was cleared up, and the deck looked quite peaceful. There seemed to be harmony about the ship. He looked around approvingly, then addressed me:

"I watched you. That was a sensible thing you did—the right thing, at the right time. You sure belong aft. You have the art of handling men. But boy, that is a sign that you will never be able to handle women. They will handle you, mark my word." Then he added.

"You better turn in now. You've had a long stretch. Get below. Take the Second Mate's room."

We had expected to reach the Island about two weeks after leaving Sydney, but when I came on deck again at midnight we were in a calm. It was more than another fortnight before we sighted shore at about ten in the morning. The breeze was so light that we did not go to anchor until nearly three in the afternoon.

CHAPTER VI

WE ANCHOR IN BULLY HAYES BAY

WE anchored about a hundred yards off the beach in a small open bay—Bully Hayes Bay, it was called, in honour of the man who discovered its privacy to form a desirable base of operations for his nefarious trade. There was only a short stretch of narrow sandy beach visible. The one sign of habitation was a small roughly built boat-landing to which was moored a cutter. This craft looked as though it had originally been a rather large lifeboat from some ship. Later it had evidently been altered by unskilled hands and now much resembled a Chinese junk.

The forward and after peaks were decked over and for about ten feet amidships a canopy top had been constructed, mostly of bamboo framing and covered with matting. Two bare pole masts supported a pair of dirty rags of a type known as sprit gaff sails, which now, slatternly flapping in the motionless air, seemed squalid symbols of the despondent solitude of the surroundings.

Near the shore end of this landing a thatch hut was nearly hidden by low palms and underbrush. It covertly suggested the type of human derelict that would be apt to seek its unwholesome insect-infested shelter.

Only three men on board of the cutter seemed to have noticed our arrival, but as soon as we displayed our trader's flag, one of them lazily strolled up the landing and disappeared in the hut, while one of the others pulled a flag pole with a flag coiled around it from under the

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canopy top and placed it in a socket aft. The breeze was too light to display the flag properly. It looked to me not unlike our own.

"H'm!" Mr. Kennedy, who was now fully recovered, said to the Captain; "I see the Bullies are around. They don't seem to be glad to see us."

"They know we just came from Sydney," the Captain answered, "so the only thing they can expect from us now is rum, and, maybe, they still got a good supply, else they would have been out before the hook was down. Bet the bunch is up in the shack now pickled in rum."

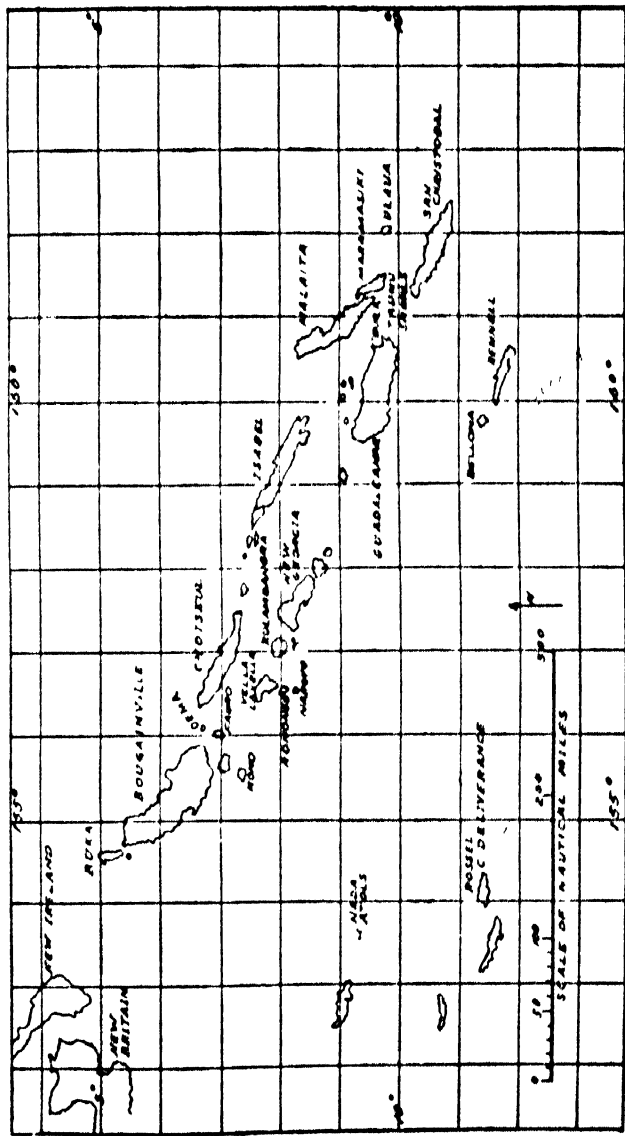
"Who are the Bullies, anyway?" I asked Mr. Kennedy. "I've heard enough about them this trip. It's about time we get acquainted."

"They're a band of free-lancers working hand in hand with the traders—that is, the traders whom they can't bully—like us, for instance. A lot of them are survivors of ships that have been plundered by Malay pirates; now they go after them once in a while and plunder them. They go along with some of the small trading ships—the ones that are friends of Bully Hayes—and help them out at landing parties. We keep them supplied with rum and ammunition, so there's no hard feeling between us, but," he added with a rather reproving glance at me, "you may know them better than you ought to, some time."

"I see they use the trade flag," I replied, fishing for more information, but feeling a bit uncomfortable at the correct interpretation of Mr. Kennedy's meaningful words.

"Yes," he said, "but you'll see a little difference; they'll be alongside here soon. On the coast they are called the Sunda Privateers, but around the Islands and by us they are called the Bullies. The niggers hate them. Damn'd good reason. They're slavers."

This was interesting information; so I continued to



The Solomon Islands where the Author for many years Traded with Cannibals. (From Soundings made by the Author and Captain McPurden at the Time of their Voyages.)

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question him trying to make my queries somewhat evasive of the real issue which interested me most just then.

"Are there many traders around the Islands?" I probed with my mind really on those who deal in that commodity known as "live ebony."

"Yes; but most of them only have small sloops and schooners," came the unsatisfactory reply. "The bulk of their trading is among the known islands. They can't carry a big enough crew to tackle the real savages. When we get a full crew we needn't be afraid of pirates or anything. Let's hope we get a few good men here anyway."

Several of the Bullies were coming out of the hut. Going down the landing, they boarded the cutter. There was hardly any breeze left by now, and I thought that it would take them the rest of the afternoon to sail out to us. But I soon saw my mistake. Five sweeps were swung out at each side—and the Bullies could certainly row. It seemed as if they made the distance with less than forty strokes.

"Hello, Captain," hailed the cutter's cockswain; "Melbourne or Sydney?"

"Sydney, and shorthanded; only got eight men for'd. Any hands we can pick up?"

"Plenty of them an' anxious to ship, if you ain't too particular."

"Anythink will do—beach-combers or swabs. Got eight good men for'd, that's enough for the watches."

"Come in shore in the morning. I'll pass the word—who's the kid?"

"That's my Second Mate."

"Say, are you running a school trip? Where's Johnson? Hell! that bunch you get here will eat that kid alive."

"Johnson joined up with Davy Jones," was the only

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satisfaction the man got. "If your maneaters think they're going to maul my officers, tell them right now to sharpen their cutlery. We'll be able to take care of them. Good day, sir."

With this parting shot the Captain turned away from the rail, and the cutter started back for shore.

I watched them glide away—they were laughing—laughing at the idea of a boy like me giving orders to such rowdies. It made my blood boil. I would show them.

In the lazaret were cutlasses, my weapons. Had I not defeated each of the combatants at Dave's place in Sydney? Had not my grandfather trained me in the art of using the cutlass almost from the time I was able to walk, much to the dismay of my parents? Very well, laugh now; I may laugh at some of you tomorrow. If there is any fighting tomorrow I shall be in it, and I shall be prepared for it, and if necessary, fight to kill. There is no law here to interfere.

It was quite plain that the skipper anticipated trouble. He knew the type of men we would ship here—they would stoop to any crime or outrage. He had been sitting on the cabin top, apparently in deep thought. If trouble were to arise he would find a way of meeting it. He did not take long to make up his mind. He called all hands aft, and then and there established a practice which was to become a standard among the free-lance traders for the remaining years of their existence. It was, indeed, Captain McPurden who first started the custom of shipping the regular crew aft, so as to have the quarterdeck complement of dependable men almost equal in numbers to the rowdies in the fo'c'sle.

"I want you all to bring your duds aft," he said. "Bunk and Cockney, you're to be boatswain and boatswain's mate. There's a spare bunk in each mate's room for you fellows.

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One of you others can take the spare bunk in the cook's quarters, and the others can use the two staterooms—we won't need them anyway. Leave the fo'c'sle to the rowdies, that will even things up a little."

No sooner was this order given than Bunk had his belongings in my room.

"I knew you would want me," he said, and welcome he was.

Early next morning we launched one of the boats. Mr. Kennedy, Mr. Guernsey and the cook were to remain on board, but before leaving, the Captain ordered me to supply each man with a gun.

"We may as well let them know who's boss before they get started," he said. I did not tell him of the cutlass that was hidden under the stern sheet of the boat.

The fellow who had steered the cutter the day before met us at the landing.

"How many hands do you want?" he inquired, after shaking hands with the Captain. "There's about a couple of dozen around the beach that'd like to ship. They'll be along soon."

"I want about sixteen to twenty. Depends upon how many are any good," was the hopeful reply.

Around a bend in the beach five men appeared, and lazily strolled toward us. The Captain eyed them critically.

"That a sample of them?" he grinned.

"Yes; that's about the run of them."

"Then I won't fear for my Second Mate."

Captain McPurden could read men like books even at a distance.

By now they had come near enough for us to size them up. They were a dirty, unkempt lot—typical beach-combers—clad only in dirty breeches and torn shirts.

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One of them, a tall raw-boned individual, wore a battered, greasy colourless felt hat. The rest of them wore caps of various patterns. Each had a sheath-knife in his belt, but the one with the felt hat also carried a bush knife with a two-foot blade, with which he was continuously hacking at protruding branches of the underbrush near the edge of the beach.

He was evidently the spokesman, for he sauntered up to our beached boat, in which we were sitting while we awaited their arrival. Ignoring the man of the cutter who stood alongside, he addressed the Captain:

"Need any hands, Cap?"

"Yes; but you and your bunch don't look much like sailors. Where are you from?"

"Beat my way here from Adelaide—jumped ship there—came there firing on a steamer. My pals here been coal-passers. Work was too hard so we quit."

"Ever sailed before the mast, pulled an oar or handled sail? I got no use for firemen."

"Sailed two years from Liverpool." This last remark was accompanied by a hack with his bush-knife at the gunwale of our boat. This rowdy was of the type who just gloat on destruction.

I had detested the fellow at first sight, but this was getting too much for me, so I shouted:

"Hey, you! quit that or I'll take that cheese slicer away from you."

He sized me up with a depreciating glance as though he considered me of no particular consequence.

"You—look what's talking! Who the Hell are you?" He jeered his disgust, scooping up a handful of sand with his bare foot and kicking it at me.

"That's my Second Mate," retorted the Captain. "My orders come through him or the First. Understand?"

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The rowdy looked his contempt.

"Who the Hell asked you for orders, you damned old bluenose?" he sneered. "Lay low or we'll chase you off the beach."

This was getting to be interesting. The Bullies' flouting laugh of yesterday rang in my ears. My right hand crept under the stern sheet, and as my fingers closed upon the hilt of the cutlass it felt like the handshake of some dear old friend. The lust of battle was upon me.

Something about my movement had aroused the fellow's suspicion. His eyes narrowed. He bent forward. His cronies stepped to his side. He regarded me with an ugly threatening expression. His attitude was that of a panther about to spring. In a thick grating voice he warned the Captain:

"Say, if you don't want us to use that kid for shark-bait, tell him to keep his hands still."

That was the challenge.

In a flash I was out of the boat at the opposite side, cutlass on guard. Bunk had been on the alert at the first sign of hostilities. He now whipped out his gun, and before the beach-combers could recover from their surprise or pounce upon me in a body they were staring into its muzzle.

Captain McPurden's jaw dropped in surprise. He had anticipated trouble of some sort, but not quite from this source. Still there was a sign of admiration in his voice as he tried to check me.

"You little bantam," he expostulated in amazement; "stow that. You ain't in Dave's place now."

But my anger was aroused. The old viking blood came o the surface.

"All right, Captain," I shouted; "I'll obey orders, but

this is my own shore raid." Then at my antagonist: "On guard there, you big hunk of shark-bait."

A whoop of joy came from our men:

"Hip, hip for our Second Mate," they shouted, jumping out of the boat, swinging their oars. They were sorry that this was only a private affair.

Over my shoulder I could see Mr. Kennedy and the cook on the *Emma P.* run aft. They had heard the commotion and were ready for trouble. Each had a rifle in his hand.

I jumped clear of the boat.

"On guard, you bum!" I challenged.

The beach-comber stood undecided, his bush-knife almost dropping from his hand. My self-confidence had almost robbed him of his nerve. Possibly a cutlass was an unknown weapon to him. It smacked too much of the bloody buccaneer.

"Fight now, or we'll fill you full of lead," our men shouted at him, drawing their guns as the other two reached for their knives. They were enraged by the other's cowardice.

But, at sight of all those guns, the beach-comber's yellow streak suddenly changed to desperation. To fight was now his only escape. Gripping his bush-knife, he made a cat-like leap for me, with a vicious slash for the left side of my neck. It was the foolhardy blind dash of a cornered rat—a left high. What a clumsy lead! The easiest to parry with a good swing for a *seconde*—the swordsman's disarming lunge—which during its swing can also be altered into a straight thrust for the body.

But what did this rowdy know about fencing? With ease I parried his vicious attack, and swung under his guard.

With a howl of pain and fury—like the yawp of a

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wounded beast—he opened his fingers and dropped his bush-knife. My cutlass had caught him under the elbow, laying his forearm open down to the wrist.

Then, just as he sank to his knees, a shot rang out close behind me. I whirled around like a top and saw one of his pals drop to the sand, his knife still clutched in his fist. He was harmless, and the shot had taken the fight out of the others as well.

Good old Bunk! His unerring aim had dropped the man before he could stab me in the back. The beach-comber had been shot dead.

"Well," Captain McPurden snarled at the other three, "are you going to ship or not?"

"Yes, sir," was the frightened reply.

"Then get to work. Take some shells and dig a hole to drop that rat in and cover him up good and deep. Lay to!"

At the first sign of disturbance the men who had manned the cutter on the previous day began filing out of the hut. They stood around but took no further interest except as onlookers. Two of them picked up the injured man and carried him into the shack, where they bandaged him up as best they could.

"He'll be no use to you, Captain," one of them said.

"Don't want him," was the Captain's retort; "but I'm going to scour the Island and shanghai any able-bodied bum that I get sight of."

"You'll have to take them by force," the commander of the cutter laughed, "if that's your method. Where'd you ever pick up that Hell-snorting youngster?"

"Boxtry Dave's crimp shanghai'd him in Sydney. Busted up Dave's show and then wanted to get paid for it. Was on board of a Yankee clipper. Now he feels at home on board the *Emma*," the Captain chuckled gleefully.

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"He'll feel more at home after he joins up with our bunch," was the commander's thoughtful prediction. It seemed as if they all had me tagged and labeled.

During this conversation I had stepped on board the cutter. I wanted to see what that mysterious flag was like. There it was, coiled around the pole, under the matting canopy. I unfurled it. It was the same as ours, with the shark and swordfish in the upper field, but the lower field was not blank like ours. It displayed a skull and cross-bones done in black.

One of the cutter's crew had watched me with interest.

"Kid, that's your flag," he said, thoughtfully nodding his head.

One by one, more beach-combers appeared. They were about the same type as the first detachment, and soon we had eleven, including the first three. The rest of them were hanging back.

The average beach-comber is not particularly anxious to face hardships at sea. Few of them are seamen. How the majority of them get to the Islands is still a mystery to me. They seem to come from nowhere, have no ambition in life and would rather face starvation along the sun-baked beaches than seek any sort of occupation elsewhere.

"They don't like the big packets," the commander of the cutter told me. "They know that you fellows will trade the bad islands, and there's more chance of getting hurt. They're yellow, most of them."

"Yes, and there's a chance of them getting hurt if they don't ship," growled the Captain. "I'm not going to stay here another day. Get your Bullies on the job to help us round them up. We'll have a crew, dead or alive. Any of you fellows want to ship?"

Cowed by the Captain's menacing attitude, two more

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stepped forward and joined the ranks of the others, but none of the rest could be persuaded.

The Captain took out his watch:

"In five minutes I'll have three more. Make up your minds quick."

Half a dozen of them started up the beach but were halted abruptly when Bunk's gun planted a couple of shots right in front of their feet.

They hesitated only an instant, then five of them stepped out to join us. And then it was our turn to stare in surprise. One of them was a woman!—a most disheartened-looking creature.

"Here!" shouted the Captain as soon as he had regained his balance from the shock. "I can't use you. Go back there."

One of the lot seemed to have more nerve than the others.

"If she can't go, I won't go." He took up the issue sullenly. "She's my wife."

Captain McPurden was dumbfounded. He opened his mouth several times but speech seemed to fail him. Finally he exploded, laughing:

"By the ghosts of dead men's fingers!" he howled, fairly splitting his sides; "the *Emma P.* is sure making history. She's the first trader that's shipped a married beach-comber. You'll have your fun, my lady.

"Pack that bunch on board now, lads. As soon as the breeze comes up we'll make sail for Guadalcanal."

He was satisfied. The first lap of the cruise was completed. As usual he got what he went after—not a very promising crew, to be sure, but he would soon pound them into shape. At last the *Emma P.* was ready to trade.

CHAPTER VII

MAN POWER

RENNELL is a lonely island. An even hundred nautical miles from San Cristoval and Guadalcanal, it can hardly be considered as belonging to the Solomon group. Surrounded by dangerous coral shoals and strong tide rips, it lies there with its smaller sister, Bellona, like a sentry guarding the entrance to the Little Coral Sea, forgotten and forsaken by all except the most daring of the traders.

It is a long way from Sydney—about sixteen hundred nautical miles. It has no harbours. Its shores are barren, with few patches of beach fit for landings. Yet it boasts abundant vegetation and several springs of cool, clear water.

Not a large island, it extends only about forty miles east and west, and about ten miles at its widest, with the highest land rising less than five hundred feet above the sea.

How the escaped jailbirds from the Australian colonies and the beach-combers ever got there it is hard to tell, but they evidently found the Island an excellent haven of refuge as no cruisers ever came near its shores. Few, in fact, knew of its existence.

But the Island also had the distinction of being the rendezvous of the Bullies. An island whose shores never were touched by cruisers naturally would interest them, for they were a daredevil, lawless band. They flattered themselves that they were a protective organization, help-

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ing the traders, but there were rumours that the Bullies might know something about the mysterious disappearance of the *Messenger*, that unfortunate missionary barkentine, which left Port Darwin on a fine Sunday morning and had never been reported since.

Their leader and organizer, Bully Hayes, whose knife is now decorating the wall of my den, as a trophy, the result of a fight I had with him on the beach of Rennell, was capable of anything but acts of charity. Although among his pals he was one of the most open handed scoundrels that ever lived.

The Bullies traveled great distances in their improvised junks or proas, but I have never known them to protect the better sort of traders who only occasionally did any blackbirding.

They seemed to respect Captain McPurden, the "Grand Old Man" of the South Pacific, but everybody liked him, at least when he stood before them, for besides his distinction as a philosopher it was said that he was quick on the draw. Also he had with him Mr. Kennedy, Bunk and Cockney—well-known men, and loyal. A skipper with such a crew and reputation had to be respected. Of course that reputation did not help him to get a crew in the trading ports, but here there were no laws to limit his power.

The Captain was not at all pleased with the crew he had "mustered in." That was plain. There was a storm penned up inside of him—that we knew—and when it broke it would be a severe one, like all storms after a prolonged calm.

To make an average of three knots an hour for almost three weeks, with a ship that can easily reel off ten, is bound to be aggravating to her skipper, but the joke of having discovered a married beach-comber had tempo-

rarily restored his good humour. The more he thought of it the more it amused him.

"I have seen beach-combers," the Captain mused—"jailbirds that would cut your throat the minute they'd have a chance, and lazy ones that would not roll over out of the sun when they were burning up, but a married beach-comber is about the biggest joke of the Island. Oh, well, get them on board. I want a drink."

We all knew what that meant. That drink which he needed so badly would start things going, and then—beach-combers you will suffer. But again Fate brought along another interruption.

Most of our new crew had been taken on board and looked out for by the able Mr. Kennedy. The last boat-load, which, among others, contained the married couple, was about ready to push off, when a sudden commotion among the crowd that had escaped the "muster in," attracted the Captain's attention.

A short, fat fellow, with hair the colour of new manila and a skin of the kind that always blisters and peels, but never tans, had appeared among them, and they were having a lot of fun at the poor fellow's expense. Slapping him on his sunburned shoulders until he howled with pain, they were jibing him and coaxing him to ask Captain McPurden for a job.

The Captain watched this performance for a while with an amused expression. Then suddenly his face reddened under its coat of tan. He drew his gun and advanced toward them menacingly.

"Here, you yellow curs," he thundered; "stop that or I'll plant every damn one of you." Then addressing that exotic specimen of humanity: "Come over here, you piece of fried bacon. What are you doing on the Island, anyway?"

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The fun suddenly stopped. The beach-combers stood around in awed silence, some of them even slinking off into the bushes, while the object of their merriment sidled toward the Captain like a bashful schoolboy confronting his teacher.

He was a boy of about fifteen to sixteen years, rather short for his age, but what he lacked in height he certainly made up for in circumference. The fat fairly bulged out over his belt, which would have failed to keep his trousers from sliding down if he had ceased pulling them up long enough to wipe the perspiration from his face. His eyes looked like mere slits in his head, and, viewed in profile, his cheeks seemed to protrude beyond the stub of a nose which resembled a radish between two beets.

Captain McPurden scrutinized him as if he were some queer specimen of a bug.

"How'd you get here?" he inquired.

No answer—only a scared look.

"What's your name? Can't you talk?"

Still no answer from the runt. He just stood there, first on one foot, then on the other, pulling up his trousers.

"Say—" the Captain addressed the commander of the Bullies, who had watched the two with a grin on his face—"is this fellow deaf and dumb? How'd he get here?"

The commander supplied the necessary information:

"Oh, he's just some fool of a kid Van Asveld picked up in Melbourne as a cabin boy. Been reading all kinds of trash about pirates and thought he wanted to go to sea. Guess he changed his mind when he shipped with Van, so he jumped ship when they stopped here. Oliver was here over a month ago and wanted to take him back to the coast, but he was scared of Oliver—said he looked too

much like a fellow named Blackbeard he's been reading about in some story. The gang here call him Polly. That name fits him all right."

"Well, you want to go along?" the Captain asked Polly, Polly nodded his head, but did not reply.

"How'd he get so fat?" Captain McPurden asked in surprise.

"He's been doing nothing but eat raw breadfruit, cocoanuts and bananas ever since he got here," the commander replied. "He'd like to stay here all right but that bunch of bums never let up on him."

"You better come with me, Polly. This is no place for you," the Captain said kindly.

Polly stood there undecided. He shot a scared look over his shoulder at the beach-combers, who were watching the show with indifference. Then he proceeded to size us up as we stood around the beached boat, with our guns strapped to our hips. Apparently he felt that he had to decide between the devil and the deep sea. We were not a reassuring lot to behold, but at last he found enough courage to speak. He asked in a timid voice:

"Are you pirates?"

It was not the words so much as the way they were spoken that produced the comedy. It brought the whole beach into an uproar of laughter. Even the woman, whose face had never lost its pained expression, joined in.

The Captain finally recovered his self-possession.

"Yes, Polly, we are pirates, and damned bloody ones at that!" he chortled, wiping his eyes. "Get in the boat before we push off."

After Polly had labouriously managed to climb into the boat, we pushed off and drew up alongside of the *Emma P.* to unload this human freight. While climbing on board, the married beach-comber, of course, displayed the same

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clumsiness on the jacob's ladder as the rest of his comrades had done before him, but when the woman ascended we could not help admiring her grace. Her clothes, consisting of a pair of white duck trousers and a light blue shirt, were the only clothes in the boat with even a pretense of cleanliness. She had a bundle with her, which she had slung over her shoulder, and instead of closely clinging to the ladder like the rest, she swung her body clear while taking the rungs with the same freedom of movement as the old-time deep water sailor. It was plain that she was no novice at it. To the observer it may appear easy to climb a rope ladder on the side of a rolling vessel, but try it and find out.

It was now Polly's turn to go up. As could be expected he proved himself to be as handy at it as a bullfrog trying to climb a rope. Puffing and panting, he had managed to negotiate about half a dozen of the rungs and was just reaching for the rail when he lost his grip and down he came. It was lucky for him that the Captain had anticipated this performance and had ordered the boat to be pushed well clear of the ship's side, otherwise he would have squashed on the hard planking of the boat bottom, like a jellyfish.

The theory that fat will float did not apply to Polly. There was one great splash and he sank like a sounding lead. In an instant I unstrapped my pistol belt and made a dive for him. But even as I cleared the side of the boat I saw a shadow shoot over my head and a figure take the water a dozen feet or more from the ship. Just as I reached Polly, about five fathoms below the surface I saw a struggle in the greenish light, not more than ten feet away, and as I came to the surface, with a good grip on Polly's hair, a head bobbed up close beside me.

It was the woman. A cheer went up from those on

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board and in the boat as she struck out for the jacob's ladder with the graceful strokes of the islanders, a knife with a ten-inch blade between her teeth. Standing at the rail, she had seen a tiger shark approach, had jumped and slit his belly open before he could attack. His dead carcass could now be plainly seen on the bottom in the clear water.

What a mysterious creature she was! While we were clambering over the rail, after securing Polly in a sling previous to hoisting him on board, she was sitting on her bundle which she had thrown on deck. Her face was buried in her hands and she was sobbing so hard that her whole body shook in convulsions.

"I'm going to find out more about that woman," said the Captain as he climbed on board. "Meanwhile, until I get the time to question her, Mr. Kennedy, don't let her go into the fo'c'sle with that bunch of bums." Then he went below.

It was now noon. Mr. Kennedy had already put the beach-combers to work at the windlass, heaving short on the chain, but there was not a breath of wind. The outlook for a breeze was slim. There was the prospect of spending another night at the Island, and that would not please the Captain in the least. He had been a teetotaler during the whole forenoon, while in shore, and if it had not been for the humour of the morning's events he would have given way to an explosion before now. But his face had already begun to darken, when he noticed, while the men were being brought on board, that there was not one of them who knew how to handle an oar.

Mr. Kennedy, who had been below for his noon meal, came on deck to relieve me, saying:

"There's going to be trouble. You'd better get something to eat quick while there's a chance. The Old Man

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was grumbling about those bums when he came out for his chow. He showed he had drinks under his belt. Now he's gone to his room to load up. Get that woman out of sight before he comes on deck."

I approached her asking if she did not want anything to eat.

Without looking up, she shook her head.

"Well, get aft into the cabin anyway before the Old Man comes on deck," I urged her. "The skipper is going to be on a rampage and we don't want him to see you."

The fellow who called himself her husband had been lounging on a waterbreaker, in the shade of one of the boats forward, smoking a short clay pipe. He raised his head and in a gruff voice growled at me:

"You leave her alone," and, then pointing at her with the stem of his pipe, he ordered "You get in the fo'c'sle now and quit your mopin' an' get yer grub. Hear that?"

I decided to assert myself right then.

"All orders here come from the quarterdeck," I came back at him.

"Oh, do they?" he said in a menacing voice. Jumping up and reaching for his knife, he made a leap for me.

Cockney had been sitting on the main hatch drowsily smoking his after dinner pipe. He was on his feet before the beach-comber had taken two steps. There was just a flash of red through the air—smack! the little redheaded devil's fist landed on the beach-comber's chin and he went down for the count.

"They'll learn ship's discipline here on board," Mr. Kennedy grinned. "That was a good start."

Without further protest the woman rose, and with a grateful smile at Cockney she followed me to the cabin.

She was a young woman of about twenty-two years of age. Her manner and personal appearance plainly showed

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that she never belonged among those roughnecks. Her dark brown hair, now a shining black from the wetting of her recent dive, abundant and wavy, was cut to a length which today would pass as bobbed. The fearless expression in her bluish-gray eyes did not belie the courage of which she had so recently given us a demonstration, yet she had a dreamy way of looking at one with unseeing eyes as if her thoughts were wandering in far-off places. The small but firm mouth, the well-moulded, round chin and shapely, well-proportioned nose, all gave one the impression that she had a will of her own and that there was nothing foolishly romantic about her make-up. The rich tan of her unblemished skin showed that she was at home in, and enjoyed, the great outdoors of the tropics, and that the burning rays of the sun would have but little effect upon her.

Her whole bearing—yes; even the scant masculine attire, although now somewhat soiled from her encounter with the shark, but of a much finer texture than would be expected on a beach-comber—commanded respect and admiration.

It did not require an artist to see that she was beautiful, nor did it require a student of human nature to place her. Why she should have selected that scrawny, dilapidated, hatchet-faced loafer for a husband! I simply marked her down as another mystery of the South Seas.

Nevertheless, there was something fascinating about this little woman—she was not more than about five feet three—and I decided to do anything I could for her.

“Don’t come on deck while the Captain is on a rampage,” I warned her, while she was sparsely partaking of the food. “You had better stay in my room over there until a place is fixed up for you, but keep out of sight of the Old Man for today. What are you doing here, and why

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did you come on board anyway?"

"Oh," she said, trying to conceal a sad smile, "that is a long story. I was always crazy about the Islands. I had an idea that I wanted to go pearling. I'll tell you more some other time. First of all, I want to get away from those men."

"Isn't that fellow your husband?" I blurted out, but before she could reply the slamming of a door in the after part of the cabin reminded me that the Captain was liable to appear at any moment. So taking her by the arm, I pushed her toward my room.

"Get in there quick and stay there. The Old Man won't think of you as long as he doesn't see you," I said hurriedly, and rushed on deck.

Captain McPurden appeared on deck shortly after me. He paused at the head of the companionway for a while, blinking his eyes. Then catching sight of the First Mate, he thundered:

"Mr. Kennedy, are we having a holiday? Why aren't we under way?"

"Not a sign of breeze, Captain. She's all heaved short and everything's ready," quietly answered Mr. Kennedy.

The Captain's voice was full of ill-boding sarcasm as he shot back:

"Well, Mister, we got ten boats drying in the sun, a good swelling won't hurt them, and we got a bunch of no account bums on board that need training with the oars damned bad. Now set to it and make them earn their grub. By sundown I want that shore out of sight or I'll feed their worthless carcasses to the sharks."

Mr. Kennedy seemed somewhat relieved, seeing that the skipper's grouch was diverted into other channels.

"Come on, you bullies, and unleash four of those boats," he sang out with a wink at the regulars who went at the

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job with glee, while the beach-combers shot anxious glances at each other.

Captain McPurden meanwhile was pacing the quarter-deck with heavy steps. Suddenly he stopped, viewing the scene of activity with a scowl.

"Come aft here," he growled, beckoning me. "Didn't I tell you that our men were to stay armed with that gang of cutthroats on board? Where are their guns?"

No such order had been issued, nevertheless I knew better than to contradict him while he was in his present state.

"They unstrapped them as soon as they came back on board," I said apologetically.

"Well, they'll strap them on again, right now," he barked back at me, "and besides that a rifle for the bo's'n, and you buckle up that cutlass and don't let me see you without it again. Now lay to it. Lively!"

When I reappeared on deck with my arms full of holstered pistols, a cutlass buckled to my left and a rifle in hand, the beach-combers fled to the shelter of the fo'c'sle.

"Gawd! What's gonna happen?" one of them yelled in sudden alarm during their flight, while the regulars laughed with gleeful anticipation.

But flight on board ship is only of momentary avail.

"Here, you lubbers! Come back and man the tackles," Mr. Kennedy shouted, starting after them with his drawn gun. "Now, over with the boats."

There were no davits. The boats on square-riggers were hoisted overboard with tackles slung from the rigging and the yard-arms. To rig them was a sailor's job, but the lubbers were compelled to beef the falls, like slaves preparing for their own torture.

"What's he gonna do?" a frightened individual asked of

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one of the regulars, while pulling on a fall with the perspiration running down his cheeks.

"He's gonna give yez lessons in rowing," the regular, who was a son of old Erin, replied with a diabolical grin.

"Yes; and clear to the Solomons, if you don't pray for wind," Mr. Kennedy added as two of the boats took the water. "Tumble in, four in each boat, and one of you bullies in with them to keep them going. The rest of you lively now. Over with the other boats. Then at the windlass. Up with the hook. I'll make you fellows sweat blood before you get through."

Captain McPurden had watched this scene from the quarterdeck with approval, a demon-like smile playing about the corners of his mouth. He must have felt like a Roman emperor viewing the arena.

"Put a bottle and a tumbler in each boat," he ordered me. "And you bullies give them their rations once in a while if they pull like Hell. If they lay on the oars give 'em the gun."

"Now, over with the towlines. Bo's'n, you go on the fo'c'sle head with that rifle and watch for trouble in the boats."

"Now then, leave that damned island astern."

Turning, so he faced the shore—where every beach-comber of the Island seemed to have congregated, he shook his fist at them and shouted:

"I wish I could make every damned one of you swine sweat out your guts."

A volley of jeers and filthy oaths was the farewell reply from the shore as we started on our way at about one and a half miles per hour.

It was lucky for our galley slaves that the tide had commenced to ebb. As oarsmen, the sixteen of them were doing about as much as four sailors could have done.

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They pulled hard enough, for right in the stern of each boat was a regular with his hand on his holstered pistol, and on the capstan Bunk was sitting, rifle across his knees, but to keep stroke seemed to be impossible for them; feathering their oars was like Greek to them. Between their catching crabs, and slipping their oars, and falling over backward, it was a hilarious sight for us watchers on board, while we catted and fished the anchor. That line of boats looked very much like a giant centipede trying to walk up a slippery glass plate.

There were two beach-combers left over. They had to help in securing the anchor, but Mr. Kennedy consoled them with the promise that their turn would come in some of the boats in an hour or so. They were not at all pleased at the prospect.

Slowly we made our way out of Bully Hayes Bay. If those sweating, panting mortals in the boats were praying for wind their prayers certainly were a failure, for there was not even a sign of breeze. It was one of those days that the gods seemed to have made to torture men—and men were being tortured.

Captain McPurden was well liquored up and he was in his glory. Every ten or fifteen minutes he would run forward and brandishing his gun, he would curse and threaten the poor fellows to pull harder; to get in stroke; to stop catching crabs—any insult he could think of he would fling at them. He certainly loved the beach-combers.

As the afternoon wore on the extra men were ordered into the boats to relieve two of the toilers, but the relieved men were not allowed back on board. They had to stay in the boats so as to be on hand to relieve some of the others after a short rest.

Thus we were moving—barely making steerage way. The shore began to fade, but very slowly. Six o'clock

came—time for the evening meal—but only one boat crew at a time was allowed on board for food and a short rest—then, they were sent back to slaving again like the lifeless parts of a machine.

But for us regulars there was to be a diversion. During one of his trips forward the Captain stumbled over Polly—pressed into culinary service by the cook immediately after his arrival—who had just thrown a bucket of galley slush overboard. The Captain landed sprawling on deck. Gathering himself up, he grabbed the frightened Polly by the scruff of the neck, slammed him across a water-breaker, and with a rope's end of the fore top-gallant hal-yard he gave him the whaling of his life. Polly howled like a lost soul. We all jumped up and down in ecstatic merriment.

Despite his crazed condition the Captain saw the humour of this incident. He had to laugh—a thing he seldom did when on a rampage.

"Mr. Guerney," he sang out; "come on with the bottle, splice the main brace—no; bring up half a dozen bottles, and make it a damned long splice."

Mr. Guerney appeared on deck with three full bottles, an anxious expression on his face. He had not forgotten the last time when the whole crew was drunk.

"We'll make the damned wind blow. Go at it, boys!" the Captain shouted like the spike-tailed tempter.

There was no need for a second invitation. At it we went, and in jig-time three empty bottles went overboard.

Discipline—what little we had—went to the winds. More liquor was hilariously demanded, and more was brought up. This was to be the final spree before the Solomons were reached and the earnest work of trading would commence. No getting drunk there. Oh, no. Many a trader had learned that bitter lesson!

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In the middle of this orgie I remembered my guest whom everyone else fortunately had forgotten. The key to my room was in my pocket. Stealthily I disengaged myself from the uproarious gang and slipped into the cabin. When I opened the door of the room she was sitting on the edge of a lower bunk, her knife in her hand. Instantly she jumped up, with the knife raised threateningly and backed against the partition. I stopped in the doorway, my finger across my lips.

"Don't make any noise," I whispered. "They have forgotten you. Lock the door. Here is the key. There is going to be Hell on board."

"Where is he—that man?" she inquired hesitatingly, lowering the knife.

"Do you mean your husband?" I asked.

"Oh, please don't call him that," she begged in disgust.

Her words startled me, but there was no time now to ask questions. My absence from the deck might give her away.

"He is pulling an oar with the rest of the gang. They won't bother you till the wind comes, and then they'll be half-dead," I answered hurriedly. "But I've got to get on deck—you stay here."

When I returned to the deck the crew were well on their way to Happyland. The Captain was holding Mr. Guerney by the collar, backed against the main mast. With his free hand he held a bottle to the struggling man's lips.

"Drink, damn you!—drink like a man or I'll put you to pulling with the bums," he threatened.

Mr. Guerney drank—there was nothing else for him to do. He knew it would have been folly to resist. The bottle did not contain any of his own private stock. To him its contents must have been more like liquid fire. As

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soon as he was released he made a dash for the companion-way.

He descended only about half-way, and then collapsed, landing in a heap at the foot of the steps—down and out.

This was the climax. Everybody was in an uproar until Jim started the chantey:

“Oh, whiskey takes the life of a man,
Whiskey Johnny;
Oh, whiskey takes the life of a man;
Oh, whiskey for my Johnny.”

All hands joined in. This was the joke of jokes: the immaculate Mr. Guerney lay at the foot of the cabin steps as drunk as a sailor.

It was a case of a happy drunk with everybody. There was no need of fighting. Men were being tortured for the enjoyment of all hands and the cook.

I was now well on my way toward a jolly jag, and in this mood I spied Polly who was leaning against the water-breaker, still rubbing the seat of his trousers.

Anxious to do my share toward the entertainment, I grabbed the poor fellow and backed him against the side of the fo’c’sle with my left and held a bottle to his lips.

“Drink, damn you, drink like a man or I’ll whale Hell out of you with the rope’s end,” I ordered.

Polly drank like a man. He finished the quart bottle, which was nearly half full—and then came the surprise. As may be surmised, all hands decidedly relished this burlesque of the Captain’s performance with Mr. Guerney and expected to see Polly follow the latter’s example by going down and out—but not Polly. Polly just sputtered and choked a little and then gave one grand whoop. He started to jig, and it was surprising how masterfully he handled his feet on the slightly swaying deck. He forgot

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all about holding up his trousers which soon slipped down, and, as they then proved to be an impediment in his dancing, he kicked them off altogether. Then he started to sing. He had not learned his songs at Sunday School, that was plain. If he had given voice to some of his choice ones at any gathering short of an aldermen's smoker it would have resulted in a police raid. The sight was too much for the Captain. He forgot his grouch and became hilarious. The fat little Polly, clad only in a shirt, by no means too long for him, dancing and cavorting around the deck, would have made an alligator forget his inborn gloom.

The sun went down. The shore had dropped out of sight, and there would be no wind now before morning. Probably not until long after sunrise. All through the night this revelry lasted, while those poor, panting, sweating devils pulled their oars, whipped into action occasionally by shots fired over their heads. They were half dead. Their blistered hands were wrapped with bandages torn from their scant clothing. The headway they made now was not much more than half a knot per hour, but they did not dare to give up. Life is sweet, even to the most miserable. The slightest sign of a mutiny, and our jolly tars would have turned into demons to whom a life meant nothing, for human life was the cheapest commodity in the South Seas.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MISTRESS OF THE *IORANO*

MORNING came and with it the sun. In the boats there was only an occasional stroke of an oar. Most of the oars were trailing by their lanyards* in the water. Most of the men were lying on the bottoms of the boats. Some of them had dropped over backward, across the thwarts, their heads and feet resting upon the planking—a lot of wretched, living dead men. There had been no more warning shots for a couple of hours. Some of the tormentors lay stretched out on deck, snoring, Captain McPurden among them. Polly was squashed on the main hatch—he was now completely naked. In his pink, blistered skin he resembled an overfat little pig. Bunk sat on the strongback of the port cathead, his rifle across his knee. He was spasmodically dozing but occasionally he would give a start and sit up. This seeming alertness of Bunk's was possibly a warning to the men in the boats that the time was not yet ripe for a mutiny; otherwise the worms might have turned. The only man on board who was fully master of his faculties was Mr. Kennedy—the mate who could drink the hold dry and still be sober.

* The traders, like the whalers, used to have lanyards—short, light lines—attached to the oars. The other end of each lanyard was attached to the thwarts of the boat so the oar could be dropped overboard without being lost. Emergencies frequently arose when a man had to let go of his oar in a hurry and pick up his rifle, and in such cases there was no time to ship the oar inboard.

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There was no further use in trying to make headway by man power. It would have been like trying to whip a lot of corpses into action. The fuel of those motors had given out. Also, the breeze might come at any moment; then time would be lost getting the boats on board.

Mr. Kennedy started to put action into the derelict crew. Oh, what a lot of soreheads! Oh, what a dark brown morning after! It would not have taken much persuasion for us to cut the lines and let the boats go adrift—beach-combers and all.

While Mr. Kennedy was reviving the cook with buckets of salt water, I sat on one of the spare spars on deck, holding my splitting head. Swash! a bucket of water came into my face, followed by another. I sat up as if galvanized, stupidly staring at Mr. Kennedy. He grinned, and asked:

“Were you thinking of your first morning on board?”

That was just what I had been thinking about—that fateful morning a month ago. But, what a difference! Then I had been the innocent, unsophisticated victim of a mean trick; now I was a willful transgressor. Oh! My head! Never again! . . . Until the next time?

To take the boats on board was a job. No help could be expected from the poor galley slaves. The last straw had been applied to the camel's back. They had to be lifted on board and carried into the fo'c'sle. They had had their first lesson in rowing. The bandages about their hands were saturated and stiffened with dried blood. Savages that we were, we had tortured them all night—now it was our turn to go on the rack and suffer.

If only the calm would hold until the last boat was on board! Luckily for us, our sails were sheeted home. At least that job was done! Oh! Such heads to work with!

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We were exceedingly careful not to disturb the Captain. The chances were that he would still be drunk if awakened now, and if he caught us taking the boats on board while it was still calm they would be over again before we could even get a cup of coffee. And then some mighty sick salts probably would have had to work off their headaches pulling the oars.

The last boat was just being laboriously wrestled on board when somebody spied faint wind ripples upon the water in the south-east, and up went the cheer:

"Hurrah for the breeze! Heave away for Guadalcanal!"

It was not a strong breeze that greeted us—only about four to five knots—nevertheless, it was wind, and the cheer was loud and hearty.

Where he had lain sprawled out on deck a minute before, Captain McPurden suddenly sat up with a start. He rubbed his eyes, looked aloft and sadly said:

"Hell! I wish I had my royals now." Then getting unsteadily on his feet, he grumbled: "Well, let's splice the main brace and get through with it. After breakfast, Mr. Kennedy, we'll string the wire. That was a Hell of a night." He was sober.

Breakfast and another splice in the main brace gave us a new lease on life. We needed it. There would be no watch below today. There was work to be done, work of such kind that it gave me a thrill that I shall never forget. Coil upon coil of barbed wire and cable were brought up from the fore hold. Outriggers, some of iron, others of wood, spiked with sharp pointed prongs like the backs of porcupines. Some of them, even now, showed signs of stain that could not be mistaken for rust.

We were preparing to meet the cannibals—man-eaters

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—the real kind that I had heard my grandfather and uncle speak about. I was to meet them myself.

The outriggers were being fastened to the sides on strong eyebolts, which protruded from the rail for that purpose. Every six to seven feet, lengthwise, clear around the ship an outrigger was attached. Strong iron or wooden frames, triangular in shape, and extending nearly three feet outward from the side of the ship. Over the apexes of those triangles, furthest from the side, the kingline was stretched—a three-quarter inch iron cable, wound with barbed wire—not the kind of barbed wire which the farmer uses for cattle fences. No; this wire had spikes, made of short pieces of double-pointed wire, and twisted around the main wire, closely spaced.

Above and below the kingline the tangles were stretched. Every two to three inches apart, along the legs of the outriggers. The tangles were stout, single or double wires also closely studded with spikes—an ugly looking craft, a trader with the wires on.

What a pity there were no amateur photographers in the South Seas! Many interesting pictures of a type of vessel that will never appear again on the seas, could have been preserved for posterity.

All the old-timers went at this task in a matter-of-fact way as if nothing unusual was being done. They had made those preparations several times before, working with the indifference of linemen wiring up telegraph poles. The thrill comes but once. After the first trip the romance of it is worn off. I forgot all about the condition of my head from last night's spree. My mind's eye could only see black forms entangled in those wires, like flies caught in the web of a spider.

The breeze was now freshening steadily, and if it held, we stood a good chance to drop anchor in Nura Bay by

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midnight, and that meant hustling. Our work, however, progressed without a hitch as all this gear had been stowed away shipshape and every part now fitted into its place without confusion. Thus we were able to afford a little breathing spell at noon. Not until then did Mr. Kennedy remind the Captain of our lady passenger.

During all the recent excitement the Captain had actually forgotten her presence, but now, being reminded of her, his curiosity was doubly aroused, and he was anxious to interrogate her at once.

She was quite calm and at ease as I summoned her from my room at his request, and as she seated herself opposite him at the table, I could see at a glance that her manner had impressed him.

He eyed her silently for a moment as she, unflinchingly, returned his gaze. For a while it seemed as if he was quite undecided whether he should address her as he would a common adventuress, or whether, after all, she might not deserve the full measure of respect due to a lady. His decision, made his words sound rather non-committal.

"See here," he finally blurted out; "what is this all about? You don't look to me as if you belonged among that crowd. That fellow isn't your husband. How in—well, in anything you please—did you ever get on that island? Come now, out with the sad story."

His bluntness did not seem to perturb her in the least. She hesitated, apparently groping for words; then continuing to look straight at him, she said in a steady voice:

"Captain, if you don't mind, I will be brief. There is no use to relate my whole life story. But first of all I will tell you, that man is not my husband, nor is anyone else. I met those creatures only four days ago. Up to then I have kept to myself. . . ." She read a question

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in his eyes. "Don't interrupt me, please; I will come to everything in its turn." Then she resumed: "My home is Rockhampton, a small settlement on the east coast of Australia. My father is a wealthy mining engineer and nearly always away from home. My mother died when I was twelve, so I lived with an aunt—my father's sister—who in her younger days had been a teacher in England. My father was an Englishman but I was born in Australia. My aunt was rather eccentric, she educated me herself, and brought me up more like a boy. I suppose that accounts for my adventurous spirit. The sea fascinated me, and I always had a great desire to roam about the Islands and do some pearl diving myself——"

"I guess you could at that——" murmured the Captain.

"—So when I came of age, nearly two years ago," she continued, "I bought a small schooner—money was no object—hired a sailing master and cruised about the coast a good deal, although many people looked askance at my outlandish behaviour. Their cutting insinuations finally became unbearable, so I got reckless and thought it was about time to strike out for the Islands where I would be left alone. I provisioned the schooner for fully six months and started on my cruise.

"My instructions to the sailing master were to go to some uninhabited island first. He mentioned Bellona and I left it to him. With my limited knowledge of navigation I was led to believe that we were really heading for Bellona. We had a wonderful trip, and after a two weeks' sail we dropped anchor off an apparently uninhabited shore.

"It was evening and I decided to land and spend a night there, anxious to see what it would seem like to be all alone by one's self on an island. I bundled up a

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hammock, a pistol, various other things and a bush-knife——”

“That’s no bush-knife,” the Captain said drily, looking at the ten-inch blade which she carried in a sheath, “but go on——”

“—I swung my hammock from two trees right in the jungle,” she continued with a look which discouraged further interruption, “and made my evening meal in real native style——” These words were accompanied by a triumphant smile——“and after roaming around I turned in and slept like a log—as you call it.

“I did not wake up until broad daylight. Then I decided to take a bath and try to catch some fish for my breakfast, but when I came to the beach my schooner was nowhere in sight.

“I thought perhaps that they might have put to sea on account of a squall or something, although I did not hear any disturbance during the night. After waiting two days I began to think that something was wrong . . . What do you suppose could have happened, Captain McPurden?”

The Captain’s face had been turning alternately purple and pale during this latter part of her narrative. His hands were moving as if he was choking somebody. He stared at the girl as if he almost doubted her sanity, then finally he exploded:

“Well, if you ain’t the innocent little sea rover! What was the name of your schooner? Who was your sailing master?”

She looked at him in alarm as if the truth was just dawning upon her, then replied:

“My schooner was the *Iorano*; the sailing master was Michael Dundee. Do you really believe they marooned me intentionally?”

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The Captain had been leaning forward, his forearms resting upon the table. Striking the table with his fist, he sat bolt upright.

"Intentionally! Dundee Mike! One of Bully Hayes's cronies! I don't think so, I know it!" He bellowed at the bewildered girl. "It's a wonder that they marooned you. They might have run off with your schooner and kept you on board as a slave. What kind of crew did you have?"

The girl's look of surprise changed to alarm.

"The Mate and the cook were Japanese, and I had four Lascar sailors, but I was always armed, and I can shoot." Her voice almost quavered.

"That accounts for it. Dundee didn't know which way the wind blowed. Nobody knows how to take those yellow and brown devils. I can see the whole thing now. He thought you'd soon go to the devil on Rennell. When did this happen? How did you fall in with the bums?"

"About three weeks ago," she replied, a little more self composed. "I stayed right where I had slung my hammock, about ten miles to the west from where I found you. I had no difficulty in finding plenty to eat and there was water but it tasted like sulphur . . . I decided to look around. I couldn't stay there any longer, I thought I would go crazy wandering along the shore. About four days ago I came to a lot of huts just back of the beach. There I found those men. There were some white women—horrible creatures—and some native women. The man, who you thought was my husband, told me that he wanted to get away from the Island, too, and he would help me if I would be his wife. I made him believe that I promised, if he'd wait until we could get away from there.

"I kept them at a distance in spite of the jeers of the

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other women, and at night I always slung my hammock some distance away."

"That was the Ghostbush where you landed," the Captain informed her, with a nod at me. "None of them ever go there, and because you came from there they didn't bother you, not on account of your gun. They are a superstitious bunch. Well, you certainly are a remarkable young lady, but what are your plans now? What will you do on board here? Not that I begrudge you the grub and room—you're only too welcome to them—but we won't get back to civilization for about eight months."

"She pondered over this for a while, studying her dainty fingers, possibly contemplating the usefulness of such ornaments here on board. Then suddenly she looked at him with a bewitching smile and queried:

"Captain, aren't there some ships that have a stewardess?"

The Captain's expression at that was a combination of amusement and admiration.

"By the ghosts of dead men's fingers!" he swore, pounding the table as he jumped up. "You have more brains than the whole ship's complement. You are a plucky little girl. When we get back to the coast we'll tie pink and baby blue ribbons in the rigging! A trader with a stewardess—Gawd!"

She rose and advanced toward him with both hands extended and a tear in her eye.

"Captain, I think you're a dear," she said.

"Help!" yelled Captain McPurden, making a dash for the companionway. Joyially grabbing me by the collar he said: "Let's get out of here, Harry; you and Bunk will have to sleep on deck till we fix up a room for this lady. Oh, by the way," he said, turning back toward the girl, "what is your name?"

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"Cathryn," she smiled back at him. "If you please, Captain, I will clear off the table now and make myself useful." By the time we reached the deck we heard her humming, "The beautiful banks of Australia."

The girl's narrative had been so interesting that we had paid no attention to our position—the skipper knew that the able Mr. Kennedy was on deck. It was now about two o'clock, we were making a good nine knots per hour, and the high peaks of Guadalcanar were already rising above the horizon. Thus we rounded the treacherous Taunu shoals by sundown, and giving them a wide berth we headed in for Nura Bay.

CHAPTER IX

CANNIBALS

IT was a dark night—no moon—and there in the distance, upon the high shore, we made out a reddish glow like that of a house on fire.

Nearer and nearer we approached the shore. The reddish glow began to resolve itself into huge fires on a bluff, while strange, weird noises began to reach our ears.

Our heaving leads, on their short lines, as yet showed no bottom but still we sailed cautiously under reduced canvas—slowly and noiselessly gliding shoreward—in a breeze which now began to show signs of dying out.

In coral and volcanic regions there is always danger of running afoul. Some of the reefs rise vertically from a depth of hundreds of feet to within but a few feet from the surface. As there were no charts available in those days, we had to find our way with log, lead and luck, the three L's of island navigation in the South Seas—in contradistinction to the four L's of off-coast navigation: log, lead, longitude and latitude.

The whole quarterdeck crew, excepting two men in the forechains with the hand leads, were on the poop, watching the spectacle in shore. Captain McPurden had been interestedly studying the scene through his night-glasses. He laid them aside as he chuckled:

"It looks as if there is Hell to pay in shore—fires stretched out for near a hundred yards or more along the

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bluff. Can any of you make out what that noise is? My ears ain't quite cleared up from that racket last night.

"How are yours, Harry?" he asked me, nudging Mr. Kennedy with his elbow. "What's it sound like to you?—or is your head still humming from the spree?"

"Captain," I answered, trying to cover my excitement; "sometimes it sounds to me like the beating of drums, and then again it sounds like a menagerie at feeding time."

All of them laughed.

"I guess you're right both ways," the Captain agreed. "They are beating their tom-toms and howling their so-called songs because it *is* feeding time. But say, boys, this is a little more than the ordinary feast. Looks as if the whole damned island is ablaze."

"Maybe they're getting ready for us," laughed Mr. Kennedy, with a glance at me and nudging the Captain.

It was plain the two were having a little fun at my expense.

"Well, if it's feeding time," I retorted, and left them alone with their jokes; "there are more tempting morsels on board than me."

The breeze had slacked now to a mere breath. We merely drifted toward the shore, the only sounds on board an occasional flapping of the sails, the grating noise of the parrels mixed with the steady splashing of the hand leads and the monotonous call of "No bottom" from the forechains.

Two of the fires suddenly blazed up so that their brightness illuminated the shore below the bluff and then, sending a shower of sparks skyward, like the bursting of a hundred rockets, these died out.

That momentary flare gave us a chance to see that we were no more than a mile from shore. We were near enough now to distinguish the weird intermittent moaning

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sounds of conch shell horns from the continuous booming of the tom-toms. Then from the forechains came the first report of "Bottom eighteen fathoms."

"At last!" Mr. Kennedy sighed. "Tell the bo's'un to stand by at the cat."

The hand leads from now on showed a steadily decreasing depth. Nine to ten fathoms was to be our anchorage, which, the Captain said, would indicate a distance of less than half a mile from shore.

Twenty minutes more of anxious waiting, the dense ghoulish silence on deck being only intensified by the grating and flapping noises from above and the blood-chilling sounds from the shore, while we barely made headway against an ebbing tide. The ceaseless "splash-splash" of the hand leads along side, stirring up streaks of greenish light in the black water, below, was beginning to wear on my nerves—it seemed as if we were drifting into eternity.

Suddenly there came a call from the fore-chains:

"Ten fathoms!"

Then from aft:

"Le' go sta'bo'd braces! Hard a' sta'bo'd th' helm! Haul 'way port braces! . . . Le' go o' cat!"

There came the rattling of block sheaves and the rumbling of the heavy chain cable . . . music to my ears . . . We had reached the cannibal shore.

To drop anchor on an old-fashioned sailing vessel was a noisy operation. There were none of the so-called patent windlasses in use. Fathoms of chain had to be hauled up from the chain locker ahead of time, overhauled over the windlass and coiled fore and aft upon the deck. When the anchor was released from the cat-head the overhauled part of the chain would sling about and rip over the windlass with a most hideous racket. Sparks from the

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flint-like saltwater rust of the chain would be flying off the windlass as if it were a giant emery wheel.

I have often wondered how certain writers manage to bring their ships "stealthily and unobserved to anchor" near the shore of a lonely island. On such shores the noise can be heard for miles. The echo from the mountains in shore sometimes reverberates for several minutes.

Thus our arrival was well announced. The echo from our rattling cable had not died out when the racket in shore came to a sudden stop. For about a minute we stood around listening in silence, which was only interrupted by the grunting sound made by the windlass as we fetched up on our tautening cable. Then suddenly, as we were beginning to clue up the sails, bedlam broke loose.

We were more than a quarter of a mile from shore but in this almost windless night air we could plainly distinguish the marrow-piercing yells of hundreds of human voices. The tom-toms were being beaten with redoubled energy—the horns must have been strained almost to the bursting point.

We all stopped work to listen. Not a word was spoken. Then Mike chuckled and broke the silence.

"Begorra! They're givin' us a grand reception," he said, and all hands yelled their defiance at the demons in shore.

"Well, at least we needn't worry about making any noise and waking 'em up," the Captain chortled when order was restored. "Let's splice the main brace and chuck for anchor-watch. Two men on watch at a time—the rest can turn in, but sleep on your guns, boys. In the morning we'll find out what the row's about."

It was now well past midnight, and, as the heat was oppressive, all hands except the anchor-watch just flopped down on deck to snatch the little sleep that could be en-

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joyed under the circumstances. This was a very good practice. The extreme chill which always came about half an hour before sunrise in those regions woke everybody in time for them to wet the deck with salt water and wash down the heavy tropical dew, which must not be allowed to dry upon the deck as it is loaded with the spores of the dry rot fungus.

Morning could not come any too soon for me. Tired as I was, sleep was out of the question. Several times I dropped off into a little doze, only to awake again, sit up with a start and gaze ashore where the fires had gone out but where the racket still continued. My mind was haunted by a constantly increasing curiosity, and before the early morning chill had awakened any of my soundly sleeping shipmates, I surrendered to a resolve to witness that show at close range, no matter what the consequences might be.

* * * * *

After breakfast I was to learn still another safeguarding trick of the trade—"covering boats." All boats were unlashed from their gallows and swung out on tackles rigged from the lower yard-arms and rigging so that they were hanging just outside the rail, within about a foot and a half above the upper tangles. The running ends of the tackles were belayed on the pin rails, with a slack stop so that the boat could be hurriedly dropped with her keel just touching the wires. The boats thus formed a good protection against arrows along the rail, leaving ample room for shooting under them. In case of extreme emergency they could be dropped upon hostile heads protruding above the wires.

In the case of a massed attack the wires did not afford complete protection against boarders. The savages had no means of cutting them, and they were too strong and

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too numerous to break but those black devils had ways of overcoming our dreaded spikes. Some of them carried mats made of tough fibre which they used to throw over the wires and then leap up on them with an agility which would have put a trained athlete to shame.

The cannibal savages were by no means ignorant. On the contrary, they were very intelligent and they were not cowards. They faced death or injury heroically. And they in turn showed great admiration for a formidable opponent. Those who came on board occasionally—as friends—invariably inspected the covering boat rigging, and their nods of approval plainly said: “We take our hats off to you fellows.” They knew we were playing a desperate game of chance with them and they respected us for that.

In savagery the Solomon Islanders, especially the Malaitans, outclassed even the Papuans and Dyaks, but they admired courage—they loved a fighter.

* * * * *

Ten o'clock came and as yet we had not noticed any signs of human life in shore.

On the white coral sand rim of the jungle-clad beach in front of the highland a number of native dugouts were hauled up out of reach of the breaking swell. Directly opposite our anchorage, for a stretch of about half a mile, the forest covered highland rose very abruptly, less than five hundred yards from the sand rim, to a height of fully two hundred feet above the sea. The top of this bluff was as level as if it had been constructed and graded by human hands, and from our topgallant crosstrees we could see several thatch-roofed structures of various sizes set in a clearing almost at the edge of the steep embankment. The largest of these buildings had no sides, the low roofs

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being supported by bamboo posts after the fashion of an outdoor dance pavillion.

Against the background of the mountains beyond, faint clouds of smoke could be seen rising from this plateau, indicating that this was the place where the fires had burned during the night. No amount of scanning through the telescopes from our crosstrees, however, enabled us to detect any signs of human life. From daybreak on, the whole island seemed to have no other occupants than numerous beautifully plumed birds and giant butterflies which occasionally flew out over the bay, circled over our tops as if to investigate us, and returned to the shore.

After our covering boats had been swung into place I began to be impatient. I had expected to see a little action and spoke to Captain McPurden of my disappointment.

"Don't worry," he said, "some of them are watching us from the bush. We'll hoist our flag. That's a sign that they must make the first move. Then you'll see some life."

We hoisted our trade flag to the main truck, and only a few minutes afterward a dozen black unclad figures sprang out of the bush. All but one of them carried spears, bows and shields of such size that they could cover almost their entire bodies. They raised their shields and bows over their heads with one hand and leaped into the water up to their knees; then swinging their spears with the other hand they went through a motion as if trying to throw them at us and pierce us with them.

"On the poop, all of you now, and swing your hands over your heads," commanded the Captain.

No sooner was this order obeyed than the figures in shore stopped their gyrations and stood like statues, with their weapons poised over their heads.

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The unarmed man now squatted himself on his haunches upon the sand, whereupon the rest of them backed out of the water and squatted around him in a circle, with their spears thrust into the sand in front of them, their shields and bows slung over their backs. For about five minutes they appeared to hold council. Then the unarmed man rose to his feet, and from a nearby bush broke a branch, which he stuck into the sand, in the centre of the human circle. One of the squatters in the ring then rose and placed his weapons and shield alongside of the branch, broke a twig from it, and, after fastening it in his hair, returned to his place. After this performance had been completed by all of them their leader took the branch and stuck it into the bow of one of the dugouts, in which he remained, while the rest of them filed into the other dugouts and pushed off. Six of them took up paddles, and out they came, toward us.

"Well, we are friends," Captain McPurden said, "although on the Malaita that humbug would mean no more than if they all had weapons with them. I wouldn't trust a Malaitan even if he was unarmed."

They came alongside in their big war canoe, hewn out of an immense solid log—a splendid looking lot of savages. They were all unclad, unless a small pouch suspended from the waist by a string can be considered as wearing apparel, their naked bodies gleaming in the sun like polished ebony below the bushy crowns of their dull black hair. Various kinds of ornaments made of bone, shell and wood were inserted in or suspended from holes in their ears, which had stretched the earlobes to within a couple of inches of their shoulders. Around their necks were several strings of shark's teeth and coral intermingled with a varied assortment of glass beads, evidences of some former trade or raid. Some of them even had ornaments

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hanging from the bone bodkins, which pierced the nose-bridges of each of them.

The fellow in the bow of the canoe seemed to be the royal interpreter; the others appeared to have no knowledge of the white man's language.

"Gottum rum?" was his first question, while the others grinned up at us evidently in pleasant anticipation. The word "rum" they all seemed to understand.

"Rum!" Captain McPurden replied, nodding his head. "Too much big fire along shore," he added, waving his hand toward the high place.

The fellow seemed to have anticipated the question. He answered it with a diabolic grin.

"Fella M'laita come flenny fella. Stof along flenny fella Gua. Fella M'laita catchum flenny Hell, fella Gua catchum flenny kai-kai," * was the rather cheerful in-

* As the reader will not be treated to the customary sign-language with which the natives used to accompany their gibberish, which they thought was English, it is necessary to translate the meaning of the interpreter's quotation:

"A lot of warriors came from Malaita. Plenty men from Guadalcanar came along to oppose them. The Malaitans suffered defeat (Hell) which gave the Guadalcanars plenty long-pig (human flesh) to feast upon."

Wherever the word "flenny" occurs it must be taken for plenty. "Kai-kai" meant something to eat. The word "catchum" always meant getting something or bringing something. "Fella" meant man or men, and "fella Mary" always stood for woman. Of course, at times "fella" was used for warrior.

The vocabularies of their own native languages were very limited; each word might have a score of meanings, depending upon its application in combination with other words. Naturally they expected to juggle the English language in the same manner.

"Fella marster" was referring to someone of importance. "Much fella marster" meant a little more importance, and "Too much fella marster" stood about at the top of the social ladder. Besides those embryonic classification terms they had a way of emphasizing one's importance by the elevation of the voice. The noisier the tone in which a person was referred to, the more important he was.

Possibly if they had had occasion to refer to such personages as the President of the United States or the King of England, they would have yelled themselves hoarse.

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formation; then he plucked a twig of the green branch and after fastening the twig in his hair, he threw the branch at the Captain who caught it as if it was the key to the treasures of the Island. "Much fella marster stof along kai-kai," was the generous invitation accompanying this greeting.

The skipper was very much impressed by the friendly welcome and the generous invitation to lunch at the expense of the enemy.

"Each one of you stick a twig of this in your cap," he ordered. "We are all invited to a banquet tonight."

"Are we going to attend?" I asked, hopefully, while handing the savages a line to make fast their canoe.

"You can have my share if you want to," laughed the Captain. "Hope your appetite will be as good as usual."

The natives meanwhile clambered on board with cat-like nimbleness, and in my own mind all the other events of the trip were now cast in the shade. Here and now Fate had presented the great occasion I had longed for—hoped for almost in fear that it would never be realized; and at the same time I received my first invitation to a banquet.

In a flash my mind was made up.

"By the Lord, Captain, I'm going if I have to go alone," I said.

Of course the savages did not understand a word of what I had said, but there must have been something about my speech that amused them, or, possibly, they mistook me for the guardian of the rum and thought it best to humour me into good-natured generosity by pretending that they appreciated my joke, for they cracked their none too handsome features from ear to ear and set up a howl which sounded like the fiendish "ha-ha" of all the imps of the dark regions.

To see those fellows laugh—no matter what the cause—

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was a sight which had humour enough in itself; thus the whole quarterdeck joined in.

The Captain, of course, was more pleased than ever at this exceptionally friendly outcome of our first encounter with these warlike islanders. The possibility of peaceful barter instead of having to trade at the point of the gun must have almost made him decide to accept the invitation, but my reckless determination to go at all costs seemed to amuse him.

"Well, well," he chortled above the uproar, "this sure is an eventful trip. First we run across a lady beach-comber, then we hear about the Guas licking the Malaitans and now my Second Mate is going to turn cannibal. What next?

"All right Harry, you can go in shore tonight and load up on long pig; that'll save that much on our provisions."

Then in a voice which drowned all the rest of the commotion:

"Come on with the rum, Guernsey; we got visitors!"

Mr. Guernsey, whenever possible and while he could think of a reasonable excuse, always tried his best not to come in contact with the savages. He had been busy all the morning with the assortment of samples of trade goods, and for that reason he thought he should not be disturbed; thus he requested our "stewardess" to bring up the "charm-water," a mission to which she responded with considerable enthusiasm. Her adventurous spirit craved the excitement of studying the savages at close range.

Our Cathryn's thought, like most women's often seemed unimaginable and obscure. Despite her masculine attire in this out-of-the-way part of the world, she used to scent herself with perfume—that indispensable necessity must have been concealed in her bundle—and for this special occasion she must have applied an overdose, for

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as soon as she started up the companionway ladder the savages' keen sense of smell informed them of the approach of an odour with which they had heretofore not been familiar. The surprise was complete on both sides. The girl had never been in the presence of really primitive natives before, and the blacks had never seen a white woman. She had not foreseen a meeting with black men who, with the exception of their nose and ear ornaments, were decidedly undressed and she would have immediately retreated if her flight had not been made impossible by the circle of nosing, sniffing savages which formed around her. Her remarkable feminine self-control, however, came to her rescue. Without any outward signs of embarrassment she immediately proceeded to fill the tumbler she carried with the fiery liquid and handed it to the nearest of her besiegers. Each one of them drank a glassful of the vile trade rum; then the royal interpreter smacked his lips, pointed at the girl, and nodding his head knowingly at the Captain, acknowledged the honour of feminine service with the words—

"He fella Mary. Gottum tofacco?" *

A half-case of trade tobacco was brought up and distributed among the savages, while another half-case was placed in their dugout along with four bottles of rum—a most generous seal of friendship.

"Givum along too much big fella kingum," the Captain ordered the interpreter.

"Too much big kinkum fella sick. Bymby he catchum rum he fella no sick. He fella stof along swafe. Flenney fella Gua sick," the interpreter informed us, then with a

* Because of the enormous bone bodkins through the bridges of their noses the natives found it impossible to pronounce the "h" and "p" of our language. It always sounded more like an "f." Hence "tofacco" instead of tobacco. At times, however, I do not quote the natives so literally as it might confuse the reader.

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grin which would turn most people's blood to water, a grin which only the Solomon Islander can achieve, he meaningly added:

"Flenny fella M'Laita mo sick." Thoughtfully patting his stomach, he reminded the Captain. "Catchum rum me fella no sick."

Upon the word "rum" the rest of the natives all followed his example and patted their stomachs.

The Captain knew how to take a hint, especially the Solomon Island variety, and had another ration of rum dealt out to them, which seemed to intensify the friendship to such an extent that he had to give the sign of dismissal several times by waving his hand at their boat until they finally discovered that no more rum was forthcoming and reluctantly made their departure after being assured that we would "stop along kai-kai" in the evening.

"Well!" Mr. Kennedy spoke up as soon as they were gone. "It looks as if the Guas are friendly. It's a case of nursing that friendship along by having the big white fella marster skipper stop along a choice meal of stewed nigger with them."

"Huh!" retorted the Captain; "that invitation is extended to all officers as well. The quarterdeck must be well represented at royal functions."

True to the national origin of his name, Mr. Kennedy was not to be outwitted. With the dignity that behoves an officer, he replied:

"Sir, it being the case that we have a very doubtful lot of swabs for'ard, therefore, in the absence of the Captain, the duty of guarding the ship's safety will rest upon the manly shoulders of the Chief Officer, while the lowly Second Mate accompanies the chief of chiefs as his executive and personally receives the execution if such formalities are in order."

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This, of course, was meant to be another jest at my expense. It was too much for the Captain. He threw up his hands and laughed:

"Damn your hide, Kennedy, you ought to wear gold braid on your sleeves." Then addressing me, he added: "All right, Harry; we'll go; you, being young and tender, will be a sort of a protection to your skipper. You don't mind, do you?"

"No;" I replied nonchalantly, "the skipper has fed me for over a month; it'd be only fair now for me to feed him, but I'm afraid, after the meal, he'd be 'flenny mo' sick' than any of the Guas."

Our jesting was interrupted by Polly who came aft and struck eight bells—time for dinner. When at anchor the cook, or his assistant, always used to look after the time-keeping.

While the Captain and Mr. Kennedy ate their dinner I remained on deck—the Second Mate always had the second table. I occupied my time by studying the landscape stretched out before me. Its wild beauty, unmarred by any of the disfiguring marks of civilization, which we, in our ignorance, have learned to call improvements, fascinated me. Here, less than ten degrees south of the equator, the splendour of the virgin tropical growth lay before me like a paradise. Cocoa-nut palms in abundance were raising their stately crowns high above the vine-tangled thicket almost from the water's edge.

Looking down at the shady side of the ship, the live coral bottom of the bay, plainly visible in the sixty feet of depth, appeared to be trying to outrival the beauty of the shore. Fish of fantastic forms and colours were swimming about; some almost motionless, waylaying their prey, others hurrying by as if they were on an errand.

I was just watching the kite-shaped body of a large

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sting-ray gliding over the bottom like a shadow. He must have been the size of a barn-door. Whenever a fish came within two or three yards of him he would threateningly raise his whip-like tail, with the curved dagger at the end. Now and then he would strike but he missed every time and the fish would scurry to safety. His wicked white eyes seemed to glare up at me as if to warn me to stay in my own element. Inwardly I rejoiced every time he missed his intended victim.

Suddenly I was aware of someone alongside of me—it was Cathryn. She looked over the side, and seeing the ray exclaimed:

“What a horrible looking beast! What is it?”

“A sting-ray.”

“Are they dangerous?”

“He looks that way; this is the first one I have ever seen. Don’t try that stunt you did with the shark—this fellow has a knife of his own,” I said in jest.

She shuddered visibly.

“No; I believe I won’t,” she replied. “I must have been mad that time.” Then, after a slight pause she added, inquisitively doubtful. “Are you really going to that—to see the cannibals—eat?”

“I certainly am,” I came back emphatically. “I am going to see all there is to be seen in this world and here is my chance.” Then jokingly: “May I have the pleasure of your company at the banquet? I think the king would be delighted.”

She evidently took the matter seriously.

“I would like to go. Do you think the Captain would let me?” she asked without hesitation.

“You what?” I exploded, staring at her.

“Oh, I mean it, really.” Her words left no doubt as to the truth of the statement.

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Suddenly there was an interruption.

"What's this here going on!" came the captain's voice in mock reproach from close behind us, and as we whirled about he shook his finger at me, saying: "Young man, do you remember what I told you about women? I gave you a couple of years then, and here it's only less than a month ago and already you're going full on the quarter. No hope for you—rocks ahead!"

I do not know which one of us turned redder, but, trying to avoid any misunderstanding, I hastily replied:

"Captain, this lady wants to go to the feast tonight."

He looked at her in surprise; then, he snapped:

"Why not? Let her!"

The girl seemed to be delighted; there was nothing wrong with her nerve. Any desire she had to study the natives and their habits would certainly be gratified. The opportunity to see real cannibals at their feasts does not come every day. I wonder how many civilized men would have the nerve to go through with it.

While everybody else looked upon this invitation as a lark, and the girl and I only had the adventure of it in mind, Captain McPurden viewed it mostly from a business standpoint. Several of the tribes on this island had banded together to repel the raiding Malaitans and were celebrating a united victory feast. This afforded us an opportunity to get on friendly terms with several tribes inhabiting a large part of the Island. It would mean a big advantage in trading after the days, or rather the nights, of feasting were over.

Guadalcanal, or Guadalcanar, as it is sometimes spelled, was an important island during the trading days. It is the second largest of the Solomons—approximately, as I remember, ninety statute miles long and thirty-five wide. The shell beds were virgin and gave up some almost

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priceless specimens. The coral grounds surpassed all other islands. Its wealth in sandal-wood and ebony had lured many an unfortunate mariner in shore and to his death at the hands of hostile tribesmen. So why should we not take a chance when opportunity knocked?

Until four in the afternoon the beach was deserted. Then small groups of natives began to gather and squatted on the sand, regarding us with the keenest interest. None of them were armed—which proved that word of our friendship must have been passed—nor did any of them show any desire to come out and meet us. When sixty or seventy of them had collected, four groups of armed men came out of the bush. There were about ten to twelve in each group, each of them carrying a spear and shield, of the type that our morning visitors had brandished at us upon their first appearance. Some also had bows and arrows. They did not go through the same formalities that our morning visitors had observed—each had a green twig fastened in his hair.

One of the armed men, apparently a chief, now ceremoniously addressed the crowd, whereupon every one of them immediately decorated himself with a twig. Then about half of those in each group of warriors, left their weapons in charge of their comrades and manned four canoes and pushed off to meet us. They were the chiefs of the four tribes who had defeated the raiding Malaitans and were now to bid us welcome.

Before they reached us we again stuck our foliage on our caps, little dreaming that we were to be thus decorated by each separate tribe until our heads looked like promising juvenile forests. A small keg of rum had already been deposited on the cabin top—thus the query, "Gottum rum?" developed itself into the avowal of "Catchum rum!" as they came alongside.

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The first one to come on board was Chief Ugu of the resident tribe—a stalwart savage with a magnificent physique, a rather intelligent face for a Solomon Islander, and something of a humourous twinkle in his dark eyes. He appeared to be a kind of outstanding figure among his own tribesmen as well as among the other chiefs. There was a certain personality about him which, despite the fact that his attire—or rather the lack of it—did not differ from the others', at once gave the impression that he was the leader who had generaled the campaign of defense against the raiders, much to the latter's detriment, the Malaitans having hitherto been considered unconquerable by the other islanders of the eastern Solomons.

Ugu's staff also included our "English speaking" friend whose distinguished acquaintance we had made in the morning.

Beside the customary ornaments on ears and nose, Ugu proudly displayed a small hand mirror hanging upon his chest. One of the other chiefs thus displayed a large brass key; another the cylinder of an old revolver, and the fourth the sheave of an old tackle block. Evidently four emblems of distinction.

The others were not chiefs—just plain warriors—the "royal bodyguard."

They all swarmed on board; our deck seemed to be alive with them. It was surprising what a capacity for rum those fellows had. After distributing the contents of the three-gallon keg among the twenty-one none of them showed any signs of intoxication.

They showed extreme interest in the workings of our covering boats which we, of course, informed them were rigged for the emergency of "fella M'laita stop along catchum flenny Hell." Their interest in the rigging reached its climax when we let them handle the boats

themselves, and for about half an hour they were busy entrapping imaginary "fella M'laita" by the hundreds. They must have depopulated the entire unfortunate island during that half hour. Every time they dropped one of the boats twenty-one marrow-piercing yells were broadcast. The racket had reached such a high pitch that Mr. Guerny nervously began to busy himself laying out ammunition on the cabin table, and the pick-up crew forward barricaded themselves in the fo'c'sle.

The performance may have been amusing to us half savages, but saner minds would have regarded it with considerable apprehension. It might have been highly probable that the rum and all this excitement could have awakened the savage nature of those fellows to such an extent as to spur them on to a massacre. Of course they were unarmed, but we were very much off the alert—crazed by the hilarity of the occasion—and we did not act the part of teetotalers ourselves. Besides that, they could move with lightning speed, and they surely would not have given us any warning. But—that was simply one of the occasions which showed what desperate chances a successful trader was willing to take.

The show finally ended with an anti-devil-devil dance—I use this term with apologies for want of a better one—which they all performed on the cabin top while the royal interpreter avowed the Gua's everlasting friendship toward us, and then announced that the "too much big white fella marsters" would now accompany the "too much big fella kinkums" to partake in the preparations for the night's feast.

When order was once more restored Captain McPurden mopped his face.

"Well," he announced, "there is no way out—at least four of us will have to go. Now, then, who has the most

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nerve? No weapons, understand. We got to take the same chance as they did and go unarmed. It's a treaty, you know."

Bunk and Cockney volunteered without hesitation, but the white peril from forward seemed to worry the skipper. He appeared to disregard the possibility of treachery on the part of the natives.

"I don't like the idea of the best shot leaving the ship, with that bunch of bums for'ard on board," he objected.

Mr. Kennedy, however, settled that objection.

"The nigger'll leave one of their own on board for every one that leaves the ship," he advised, "so that bunch of yellow curs won't dare to poke their noses out of the fo'c'sle."

In the morning we found out that he had predicted correctly.

"Well, how about it?" The Captain resumed his call by challenging my nerve with a provoking grin. He seemed to be satisfied with Mr. Kennedy's viewpoint.

"Oh, I'm as good as there," I replied without hesitation. Nothing could have stopped me now that my dreams were being realized sooner than I had expected. Or was it the rum under my belt?

The natives were already clambering into their canoes—we were to go in their boats—when I noticed Cathryn standing near the companionway.

"Well," I said, testing her courage, "what do you say? Have you changed your mind?"

She seemed hardly to notice the challenge.

"Can I go—" she hopefully asked the Captain.

Evidently he did not underestimate her nerve. Her request did not seem to surprise him in the least at this crucial moment.

"If you want to!" he laughed. "But let me warn you

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before it's too late, you can't come back on board till it's over."

She did not say another word but followed me into one of the canoes. Her eyes were fairly sparkling. I wonder whether the poor girl had any idea of the horrible sights she was about to witness? I must confess I knew just as little.

The Captain, Bunk and Cockney had each stepped into one of the other three boats, and thus the picnic party proceeded shoreward. Mr. Kennedy, watching our departure from the poop, looked almost sorry that he was not with us, but that able executive was needed to guard the safety of the ship.

"Hope you will have a good time, and don't mix stewed nigger with roast nigger or you'll be fella sick," was his parting shot at us.

To my surprise I felt no apprehension. In fact I felt hilarious as the thought struck me that this was the first time in my life that I had taken a lady to a banquet. And this *was* to be a banquet!

CHAPTER X

"LONG PIC"

BY the time we reached the beach the shore was alive with natives. They all had more or less foliage twisted into their bushy hair, which gave them a somewhat reassuring aspect. Nevertheless it required a fair amount of imagination to be able to look upon such an assembly of howling devils as friends. Most of them had no weapons, but even when empty handed the Solomon Islander with his ear ornaments of shell and bone, his bone bodkin through the bridge of his nose and a demon-like grin on his none too handsome features is not the most pleasant looking host to bid one welcome.

While scores of them leaped waist-deep into the surf to drag the heavy dugouts with their occupants well out of reach of the breakers, I kept my eye on Cathryn's face, looking for a sign of nervousness. She sat there with her jaw set and a sparkle in her eyes that betrayed nothing but grim determination, and as soon as the boat came to rest she jumped out with alacrity as if she had just returned among a party of old friends.

In a jiffy she was surrounded by a score of yelling, dancing figures.

"Get back in that boat there!" the Captain shouted to her. "Do you want to spoil it all? You have to wait for ceremonies here."

The chief, who was seated in our canoe, now flung a hurried native command at the group about her, where-

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upon two of them picked up the bewildered girl, and, none too gently, sat her back into the canoe.

"You fool, they were starting a devil-devil dance around you," warned the Captain. "Another break like that and you might wake up in the stew-pit."

The girl seemed to have no fear. Woman's curiosity had the best of her.

"I wonder what it does feel like to be eaten?" she said to me, with an indifferent smile.

The chief of the resident tribe was squatting in the same canoe with Captain McPurden. He rose to his feet and with many gesticulations addressed the crowd, who, with the exception of the armed guard, now squatted upon the sand, with their arms extended forward over their knees—a rather peculiar posture they have when relaxing.

Of course, none of us could understand any part of his lengthy "speech," but nature seemed to have endowed the savage with the faculty of making himself fairly well understood by signs. He informed his people that we were friends of fella Gua. Did not the foliage on our heads prove that? We were bitter enemies of fella M'laita. Didn't we come prepared to repel any of their attacks with our barbed tangles and our covering boats, which the Guas knew how to work, but the Malaitans were ignorant of? Were we not highly civilized men? Almost as civilized as the Guas, who knew how to prepare their enemies for a feast as enemies should be eaten? Whereas the Malaitans were the low-down savages who made a practice of eating their own women!!

I was never in love with after-dinner speakers, let alone before-dinner speakers and was therefore glad when the speech was over, little dreaming that the worst part of the greeting was yet to come.

When the chief finally concluded his address he was

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dripping perspiration from head to foot, and now came an interesting part of the ceremony. The chief bent down over Captain McPurden and took a good smell at him, to which the Captain had to respond by reciprocating the compliment. The native form of greeting. We all had to do likewise, and during the next half-hour or so I must have been smelled by and smelled in return about three hundred savages. None of them were perfumed, and if the reader thinks he would enjoy these courtesies he is welcome to the memories of my share.

Cathryn, with her perfume, evidently made a hit with them, for most of them came back at her with a second and third smell. When I met her some years later at a social function at Port Darwin, and she related this experience, she was severely scrutinized, through many a gold rimmed lorgnette, by ladies who could not quite appreciate the humour of such an occurrence.

When the sniffing ceremony was finally over, the five of us, together with the four chiefs, were surrounded by the armed guard, and thus headed the procession toward the place of mystery.

Only a short distance from the spot where we had landed, but well hidden from view by dense clusters of mango bushes, we came upon a well-trodden footpath, cleared through the jungle. The path was seven or eight feet wide. The thick tropical foliage joining over its top from both sides formed an arcade which was almost entirely impenetrable to the light. The dank earth floor, worn down by thousands of feet, through many generations, until it had assumed the shape of a huge trough, was covered with moss which gave up a sickening, sweetish, moldy odor.

For about two hundred feet we followed this path, which with several turns to the right or left gradually wound

itself up the hill. Then we came to a fork in the path. One branch, apparently the main road, led straight ahead while the other branch took a sudden turn to the left. We were led up the left turn branch, which was much steeper than the other, very crooked, and at every turn had a branch leading off, some of them straight ahead, others taking a sudden turn.

"What a spooky place!" Cathryn broke the unhealthy silence in an awed whisper. The scene actually made one feel reluctant about raising one's voice in speech, but the Captain had heard her remark.

"All those branches and the main road which we were heading for a while ago lead to the pitfalls," he volunteered. "Without a pilot a fellow wouldn't get very far."

Then came silence again—silence which could almost be felt.

The only noise was the weird screeching of cockatoos and the squashing sound made by the many feet upon the soggy moss. It *was* a spooky place.

Thus we proceeded for about a thousand feet, the path turning and winding more and more the further we advanced.

The black mouth of a natural cave now yawned before us in the twilight—it was twilight here but the sun was still far from going down.

We entered the cave. It was pitch black in there; the sucking squish-squish of our feet on the wet bottom reverberating from the walls of the cave was now intermingled with the dripping of water, and the stench was sickening. The uneven surface of the floor of the cave made us whites stumble about, but the natives led on with unflinching steps. Cathryn clutched my arm with both hands. I could feel her shaking, and I myself began to feel a nervous, creepy sensation going up and down my spine.

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Then, as we turned a bend in this banshee infested tomb, there came signs of light again, and we were all breathing easier.

The cave turned out to be only a short, crooked, natural tunnel, for presently we emerged into a small clearing in the jungle, where we saw daylight for the first time since entering this labyrinth of reeking foliage, earth and rock. It was the sort of spot where one could not help but think: “What a place for murder!”

When our eyes became accustomed to the light we beheld a low bamboo structure, the sides of which were made up of elaborate lattice work, with its posts extending fully ten feet above the thatched roof which they supported. Each one of the supporting posts was crowned with a human skull.

Our escorts now surrounded this structure, while the chiefs and the royal interpreter took us to the entrance, but no one stepped inside. Only the devil-devil doctors ever enter this place. Any other being who enters is doomed.

This was the kamal of the devil-devil doctors. Looking into it from the open clearing, in the bright sunlight, it was almost pitch dark within, the bamboo lattice work being covered on the inside by thick, mouldy grass matting. But a flickering smoky flame on the altar made it possible to discern objects which the light through that small, low door never would have revealed.

We saw three long rows of dark figures squatting upon the dirt floor, their ankles and wrists tied. Their elbows were below their knees, and long bamboo poles had been passed between the backs of their knees and the bends of the arms of several of them in a row.

There must have been at least fifty of those unfortunates. They squatted there with expressionless faces—seemingly

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lifeless—only rolling their eyes—unwholesomely gleaming in that spectral light—toward us when we came to the entrance. In the ventre of the structure was a rough stone platform, about three feet high—the altar on which the ghostly light burned—and standing on this platform were three bamboo cages just large enough to hold a man standing upright. Each cage was occupied by an elaborately decorated savage.

"Devil-devil fella M'laita he fella," the interpreter informed us with a grin.

Here, at the threshold of their doom, with the gyrating shadows of those miserable creatures dancing about the smoke-blackened sides of this temple of the imps, he was able to gloat at the thought of their impending fate. Those islanders were real savages.

But there were other devil-devil fellas outside of the cages. They were standing guard over their captives, six of them armed with long spears, their gaudily decorated greased bodies glistening in grotesque colours, their ears so burdened with ornaments made from sharks' teeth, coral and pieces of polished pearl shell that the lobes were actually dragging on their shoulders. They stood there sulkily motionless, leaning upon the shafts of their spears and regarding us whites with wicked shining eyes as if to say:

"One step across the forbidden threshold and——"

Thus the Gua devil-devil doctors, friend to no man—not even their own tribesmen—only to the cruel demons whom they call their gods.

Here we were at the place where the mystery begins, at the very foot of the place where the mystery ends. Looming above us was the High Place.

We passed around the temple of horror, which even the chiefs never enter, and came to a steep pass leading to the

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plateau, about thirty feet above the clearing. The incline was so steep that crude stone steps had been built on it. and grotesquely carved and coloured totem poles, surmounted by human skulls, stood at each side, at the foot and at the head of these steps—in front of us, all around us, the decorations spoke only of horrors.

This was the passage to the High Place, used by the chiefs and their guests, as well as all the merry-makers. This was the pass we took, for we were guests.

But there, a short distance over to our right, was another pass, for the devil-devil doctors and their assistants—the pass of death, haunted by demons who would tolerate its use only for the purpose of sacrifice. Walled in on both sides by poles, crowned with skulls—the skulls of those who had gone that way—it wound its way up the steep embankment in the gloomy shade of aged banyan trees, taboo for all occasions except the carrying or leading of the doomed.

That pass, fortunately, was not open to us.

When, led by the chiefs, we arrived on the plateau, the hair-raising noise started. We had thought the place deserted, but the “musicians” and devil-devil dancers were present.

The enormous tom-toms—large hollowed wooden logs about four feet in diameter and fully ten feet long—started their monotonous, lugubrious booming, and immediately the dancers commenced their weird antics, brandishing all sorts of queer implements—clubs, rakes made of bamboo and even steel knives—around a group of yawning black pits and heaps of fire-blackened stones.

Even then, while the sun was yet above the horizon, those thunderous detonating sounds and the sight of those surging figures about the pits were enough to stop one's

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heart from beating. We now were on the High Place—the scene of centuries of gruesome revelry.

The racket kept up until the chiefs, after leading us around the place, seated themselves upon matting spread upon stones under one of the thatch-roofed sheds, and motioned us to be seated.

The high place was an interesting, though awe inspiring study. As we now viewed it from above we could see that it was considerably further back from the shore than it had appeared from the bay. A stone-paved clearing, about one hundred feet from the brink of the embankment, and stretching about two hundred feet parallel with the shore, it was gloomily shaded by the tall spreading trees and tropical ferns on three sides, and on the side facing the sea by three thatch-roofed bamboo structures with their backs toward the edge of the cliff. One of those structures—about fifty feet in length and twenty feet wide—had no furnishings, its floor being covered with large stones, polished from ages of wear. Flanking each side of this building were the chiefs' and the priests' sheds, containing raised stone seats covered with matting. On the other side of the clearing, with its back toward the forest, was the cook's shed—a long, low, narrow structure, housing long stone platforms—the tables used for preparing and carving the "long pig." In the centre of the clearing were the pits, about five feet deep, eight feet long and about five feet wide—four in number—lined with stones, fire-blackened as were the stone heaps alongside of them.

The preparations for the feast were about to begin. The dancers stopped, and the throng which had remained around the temple below, now began to file up the steps and squat upon the floor of the large pavilion-like structure. It was a large hall, but it could not accommodate

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them all, as there were members of four tribes present, so many of them had to sit outside.

The devil-devil dancers began filling the pits with wood, and as soon as several fires were roaring, scores of women appeared, among them the chiefs' wives, and squatted upon the ground in the cook-shed—creatures who looked even more repulsive than any of the men.

The fires were roaring; the sun had set, and the tom-toms were frantically summoning the demon spirits to witness the impending sacrifice of their enemies. With marrow-chilling yells the devil-devil dancers attacked the piles of stones and started throwing them into the roaring pits, dancing like mad demons incarnate while filling the pits almost to the top with stones and wood. They danced toward the skull-lined path leading down to the temple; down the path they danced, while the tom-toms kept up their heartrending booms until the last devil-devil dancer disappeared from view, his hideous body, illuminated by the blaze from the pits, looking like Satan gliding down into Hades.

The tom-toms were now sounding only with a low rumbling noise, so that the rustling and crackling of the fires and the shrieking of the startled wild birds could plainly be heard above the droning clamour.

Two or three minutes passed thus. Cathryn sat there like a stone image, staring at the fires, as if in a trance. Her face was set in grim control as two of the devil-devil dancers appeared in the glare with a bamboo pole between them on their shoulders. I saw her shudder. Suspended from this pole, by tied wrists and ankles, his torso swaying with every step of the bearers, swung the limp body of a man.

He was not dead, for when let down he squatted upon the ground facing the fire—without a struggle or even

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a sign of apprehension. He certainly knew what was going to happen; he probably had feasted upon his enemies during his time and he evidently considered it one of life's proper events that he should now be eaten by them.

Without warning, one of the bearers stepped behind him, and, raising a heavy war club, brought it down upon the man's head with a sickening thud. As the poor wretch fell over Cathryn collapsed in a swoon. After all, she was feminine, but none of the savages took notice of her.

Then more prisoners were brought up and despatched in the same manner. It was all done with the same unconcern as butchers slaughtering dumb beasts.

Contrary to general hearsay, the islanders did not torture their victims. They even spared each victim the unpleasant anticipations which he would be bound to experience when seeing his comrades despatched.

Then came what was perhaps the most gruesome sight of the whole ceremony. It was when the women attacked the bodies to prepare them for roasting. As usual, the female of the species proved the more dangerous. The women seemed to relish their work.

The disemboweled and beheaded bodies were thoroughly cleaned and filled with breadfruit, bananas, yams, taro roots and other native fruits or vegetables. The heart, liver and other delicate parts were placed among the filling, and the whole "long pig" wrapped up in banana leaves. The scalp, being removed from the head, the latter was well packed in fresh seaweeds and then carefully wrapped up in banana leaves. It was a most sickening sight.

The fires by this time were well burned down. Some of the hot stones were now taken from the pits by means of the crude bamboo rakes and wooden paddle-shaped shovels. The wrapped-up "long pig" and heads were

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carefully laid upon the remaining stones in the pits, covered with the stones previously taken out, and new fires were kindled on top of the heaps.

Other meats, such as wild pig and shark meat, were similarly prepared and roasted for those of the men who had never slain an enemy and the women who were not the wives of warriors.

Throughout this procedure the tom-toms were booming wildly. The devil-devil dancers who attended to the fires and the pits kept up their mad gyrations, chanting weird songs to their heathen gods in praise of their own warriors and in mockery of their enemies.

The sound of conch-shell horns came from the darkness; their doleful moan growing louder and louder, then gradually dying down to a plaintive whimper as the priests—the devil-devil doctors blowing the horns themselves—came up the path, their gaudily painted bodies, slowly gliding into the glare of the flames like one enormous reptile swaying and writhing, as, in fanatic imagination, they drove the spirits of the slaughtered victims from the scene.

Now all the tribesmen excepting the chiefs and their guests joined in the mad dance around the fires, while the booming of the tom-toms was getting to be more like the roar of continuous thunder.

The sight of all these naked black figures, gleaming reddishly whenever they came within the glaring light of the fires, then changing to jet black silhouettes again as they passed between us and the pits, their ghostlike shadows dancing about the illuminated treetops in the most fantastic forms, was a picture as impressive and unearthly as Dante's "Inferno." No more appropriate noises could have possibly been produced for an occasion like this than the dull beating of tom-toms and the monotonous

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moan of the conch-shell horns re-echoing from the distant mountains in this pitch dark night air.

The women now joined in the mad dance, and, most disgusting of all, they were continuously throwing parts of the bowels of the slaughtered victims into the flames, while the men now and then added fresh fuel.

The stench from the burning remains was terrible. It must have been this obnoxious odor that brought Cathryn back to consciousness. With a start she suddenly sat upright, staring at the spectacle before us, but never uttering a word.

For about two hours this gruesome ceremony lasted, until the last scrap of the intestines had been consumed by the flames. Then the demons rested.

The women, however, busied themselves with the preparation of *kava* or *kaua*—the native drink—which is always freely indulged in before feasting but never after.

They say that it makes one deathly sick to drink this brew after eating, but most civilized persons would be sick if they tried it at any time, after seeing it prepared. It is always freshly made. The process of fermentation takes place in the stomach. Its taste is hard to describe. It rather suggests a fruit-juice that has gone moldy.

The *kava* root, which somewhat resembles a huge gnarly potato and often weighs more than two hundred pounds, had already been scraped into large wooden bowls. Now came an interesting proceeding. The women took handfuls of this scraped mush, chewed it thoroughly and spat it into other wooden bowls. Fresh cocoanut milk was next poured over it. The mash was then thoroughly mixed by hand and squeezed out with the hands, the juice being allowed to run through cocoanut fibre screens into wooden bowls.

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The *kava* was ready. Enjoy it and weep! No wonder the Big Chief was “flenny fella sick” the morning after.

There was one consolation, however: Bad teeth were unknown in the Solomons. But—the women did not wash their hands after disemboweling the “long pig.” Yet, after all, the *kava* went into the same stomachs!

So well were those efficient cooks able to gauge their time that before the *kava* was ready the “long pig,” as well as the plain meat, was roasted.

Huge brushes, made of the stems of palm leaves, were now used to sweep the smoldering embers off the stones. As each hearth was swept off many of the brushes caught fire and showers of sparks went skyward. This was the spectacle we had beheld the night before when we had seen the fires die down.

The top layers of stones were now removed, the stone slabs in the cook-shed covered with fresh banana leaves, the roasts were lifted out of the pits with long curved poles and placed upon the covered slabs.

The charred banana leaf wrapping crumbled like punk, and there before our eyes, in the flickering light of the candlenut torches, were the now reddish-brown, steaming bodies of the “long pig.”

While the tom-toms were sounding and the *kava* was being served in cocoanut-shell cups, the meat was carved and placed upon large leaf platters.

I have seen many so-called civilized picnics among all classes, but never have I seen such order and demonstration of good manners as among those savages. There was no greedy crowding. Every one of them provided himself with a banana leaf “napkin”—there were stacks of them ready—and patiently seated himself, awaiting his turn at being served.

The serving was done by the women, excepting the

four chiefs' wives of whom there were eleven. Chief Ugu had but two wives, the others had three each.

The heads were eaten by the devil-devil doctors, and the grinning skulls then stuck upon spears around the pits. The arms were devoured by the chiefs and their principal warriors, while the chiefs' wives gorged themselves on the hearts and other parts which had been placed among the filling.

We five visitors? We modestly protested that we were no great warriors; had not taken part in this epoch-making victory over fella M'lanta; we were but common traders, overcome with gratitude at the honour of being permitted to partake at such a royal banquet, and, although our appetites were none too keen, we would be satisfied with the meat of the humble wild pig.

But did we, really, eat that? The islanders have a queer sense of humour—they can “smell a rat.” The most I will say is, that I have eaten wild pig since, killed by my own hands, roasted in native style, but—this tasted like a different sort of pork. The way old Ugu chuckled to himself while we were eating it, comes back to me now. Please, reader, do not be persistent. Let me live on in blessed ignorance.

CHAPTER XI

KAVA

THE effect of *kava* comes after eating, and it seems to stimulate the appetite. Thus, while worrying down a piece of baked breadfruit, a drowsy feeling came over me; something soft dropped into my lap, and through the mist which spread over my eyes I could see bushy brown hair and a tanned face glowing golden in the dim light.

My eyes closed and I heard a roaring like distant breakers—the breakers of Elizabeth Reef, my wandering mind imagined. Above this roaring I dimly made out a voice and tried to jump up, but this was not the Captain's voice. In strange, drawn-out tones I made out the words, "h-e-f-e-l-l-a-" as it seemed to die out in the distance and change into a pounding, getting louder and nearer.

I imagined that I saw myself on the fo'c'sle of the *Emma P.*, the pounding was the noise as we had struck the reef, while I had fallen asleep on the lookout. Then I fancied that I heard the Captain's voice say, "Anything that runs afoul of those reefs—" and, with a start I sat bolt upright, with the pounding of the tom-toms sounding in my ears.

For a brief moment I sat there stupidly staring at numerous black figures dancing around glowing embers in an uncanny light. I saw others pounding and hammering like mad upon large logs but no sound came forth from them; my ears seemed to be filled now only with a roaring din.

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My head sank down again, this time upon something soft. For a brief interval of time my eyes rested upon one of the hideous faces of a totem pole with its skull crown. It seemed to come to life, stealthily creeping toward me—nearer—nearer. I imagined a huge black claw reaching for my throat. I wanted to run but could not move. Then, just as the claw-like fingers were about to grip my throat, I felt as if I were sliding away from the terrible vision—sliding gently into the hands of a beautiful woman who softly held up my head and smilingly whispered into my ear, "Boy, you will never be able to handle women; they will handle you."

Then more beautiful women gathered around me and gently placed me upon a bed of roses. Then I felt as if I were sinking—gliding down, through roses, into an unfathomable depth. The beautiful faces seemed to fade gradually, farther and farther away above me, and with the most wonderfully relieved feeling I felt myself yielding to comfortable unconsciousness, while the roses about me were turning darker and darker, until they appeared to assume a deep purple hue as time seemed to go by—years upon years—and I felt relieved of all bodily cares, resting like a spirit floating in space—no material contact with anything earthly. Thus I felt as if floating for ages.

Then, after apparent years of this, I felt as if rising, gradually and softly at first, then faster and faster—soaring at lightning speed—while the purple surrounding me rapidly faded and turned to a bright orange.

I began to feel things. There was something I wanted to get away from but could not make out what it was. Then something seemed to be getting plainer: it appeared as if innumerable little imps were swarming about me—they started to pinch me; they stung me; they tickled my feet, my nose—wherever they could plague me.

I struck out with my hands and kicked at them with my feet, but, no use; they were so numerous and so small and quick that I was defenseless.

All at once, almost like a shock, my eyes opened and I saw the tops of trees gently waving above me in the morning breeze.

Flies were swarming about me by thousands; bugs were crawling over me; ants were probing the texture of my skin, and then something slimy, clammy and scratchy on my bare chest brought me to my senses—it was a little lizard disputing its right of existence with a large pinch-bug.

I sat bolt upright, shooing the insects away, while the events of the night before flashed through my brain like a terrible nightmare. I was still on the High Place in the chief's shed, but, with the exception of the four chiefs, who were sprawled out like dead men, and our own company, the place was deserted. I had taken but one cup of *kava*, and suddenly remembering, shuddered at thought of the repulsive stuff.

A light blue smoke was still rising from the pits; an odour of charred flesh was in the air and half bewildered I commenced to look about me. Cathryn was lying near me, with one cheek resting upon a piece of baked bread-fruit, on which numerous ants were feasting. While trying to remove this for her comfort I heard Bunk's voice behind me.

"Don't wake her," he warned; "a *kava* drunk has to be slept off. I guess none of us took much of it, so they'll all come to pretty soon; but the chiefs will be dead till late this afternoon, 'cause they got their bellies good and full."

Nevertheless, I could not bear to see the ants crawl around the girl's face, and gently raised her head to slip

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a piece of banana leaf under it. She must have been just at the verge of waking, for despite my care she opened her eyes and began to look around. For a few minutes she appeared to be in a daze; then, suddenly, with an exclamation of "Oh, horrors!" she jumped up. She seemed to be master of her faculties all at once. "Let's get away from here," she said with a nervous shiver. "I don't want to see this thing over again."

"Can't do it till the Old Man and Cockney wake up," replied Bunk; "We'll need a guide. There's pitfalls on the jungle path."

She did not reply, but started to stroll toward the edge of the place farthest from its entrance. There she stood staring at something as if she were rooted to the ground. When we joined her we found ourselves gazing down into a deep pit nearly half-filled with human bones.

The three of us—once more in our right minds—stood there, staring at this gruesome sight as if held by invisible hands, when a noise behind us brought us about in sudden terror. Our alarm, however, was unjustified; we discovered it was the Captain and Cockney, who had come to life apparently none the worse for wear.

"Well, cannibals," was the Captain's greeting, "how did you like your *kava*?"

At the sound of that word the girl shuddered again.

"I don't see how I ever persuaded my stomach to accept the stuff," she disgustedly replied. "What interests me most of all is how we can get away from here. You said something about pitfalls yesterday."

"Oh, that part will be easy," consoled the Captain. "Going down we'll be able to avoid them all right, but we'll have to pass that infernal temple below, and there's no telling what those devil-devil doctors may do; we can't make friends with them. We sure are a fine bunch of

fools." He took out his watch. "Only half-past seven," he said, glancing toward the bay, where the bark was lazily rolling on the light swell. "Hell don't get moving here till afternoon. Who'll spy on the bunch in the temple?"

With all the horror of the place preying dully on my mind, a most dejected feeling seized me. In that frame of mind I would not have cared if a spear thrust had ended me. So, without even thinking about the consequences, I spoke up.

"I'll go Captain," I said, and started to crawl down the stone steps.

There was no need for my caution. On reaching the temple I found the devil-devil doctors, prisoners and all, sound asleep.

Later I learned that they made a practice of dosing the prisoners thoroughly with *kava* and foods to make them unconscious during the feast, although the chances of their escape were very slim considering the way they were secured. Thus, much relieved, I ascended the steps again and beckoned the others to follow.

Stealthily we sneaked past the temple. None of its occupants stirred. Safely we reached the mouth of the cave. Inside, however, we soon were up against numerous difficulties; we stumbled over rocks and slipped about upon the slimy floor until it seemed as if we might have to abandon our mission until we could get a guide; then, suddenly Cathryn startled us with a muffled cry. She had put her hand upon something soft which, she said, felt cold and slippery and moved.

From outside, that sound would have been hardly audible but inside the cave it sounded like a gunshot to our strained ears. We stood in silence for a few minutes, not hearing no other sounds than the dripping of water. We moved on again—more cautiously—and, after about

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ten anxious minutes, we could see the soft greenish light of the jungle ahead of us.

We encountered no great difficulty in negotiating the jungle path. Although it was as dark as twilight, by keeping our eyes close to the ground we still were able to discern the many footprints of the day before upon the damp earth and in the soft moss. We did not meet a human soul but otherwise there was plenty of life all around us. The ground was fairly swarming with insects and rats. Giant centipedes and huge ground spiders of an ugly dark green colour scurried off into bushes at our approach, but we saw no snakes, which was quite a relief for Cathryn as she had already expressed herself as not being overfond of such creatures.

As there were only five of us now, and we were forced to proceed slowly, we had a chance to admire the vegetation that skirted the path. The trees on both sides were thickly interwoven with vines which prevented any attempt at a detour through the jungle. Among the upper branches of the trees there were orchids so varied and beautiful in colour, that the most enthusiastic horticulturalist, had he seen them, would have henceforth been discouraged from any attempt to compete with nature.

"And all this beauty," Cathryn wistfully remarked, "nature had to waste on savages whose greatest pleasure is to eat each other."

It took us almost an hour and a half to make our way from the High Place to the beach. Then, at last, we lost no time in attracting Mr. Kennedy's attention and signalling for a boat to be sent in shore for us.

Once again safely on board the *Emma P.*, we were received with many cheers. Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Guernsey met us at the gangway. They admitted that they had felt considerably more anxiety about our safety than the

former's jocular mood of yesterday had led us to believe, and were pleased to see us without even any after effects of the vile *kava*. The five savages who had been held as hostages on board received us with a grin which almost reached from ear to ear. But they had no desire to make their departure, although the Captain offered to send them in shore in our boat. After we had our breakfast—this time far more certain of what we were eating—they entertained us with a real devil-devil dance, while Mike and Cockney imitated the tom-toms by pounding one of the spare spars with a couple of greenheart belaying pins.

Cathryn watched them with sparkling eyes for a while; then suddenly she turned to the Captain who was comfortably stretching himself in a deck chair under the awning.

"Captain," she said, "you understand that under the circumstances I came on board with no money—with nothing, in fact, except what I am wearing, so I suppose you will stake me the same as all your men."

"Why, of course," the Captain laughed, amused as well as surprised; "anything you want. Just tell Guerney. He will fix you up and mark it down on your account."

"Thank you, Captain," she replied with a smile; then addressing Mr. Guerney, she said to that puzzled gentleman:

"Please, Mr. Guerney, let me have two sheath knives, the kind you use for trading."

Mr. Guerney almost fell over while the Captain gripped the arms of his chair too dumbfounded for words. They thought the request about the queerest that a woman could have made; nevertheless, Mr. Guerney produced the knives, while the Captain mused:

"Now, I wonder what's going through that girl's head. Women sure are queer critters."

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Cathryn received the knives with as much ecstasy as if she had discovered lost treasure, and then singling out one of the savages, who were now squatting on the deck enjoying clay pipes which Mr. Kennedy had presented to them, she pointed at his ear ornaments, and showing him the knives, she said:

"Swap?"

Before we got over our astonishment at this seemingly ridiculous trade, the savage almost tore his ears off in removing the ornaments and had the cherished knives in his possession, while his comrades crowded around him to admire the treasure.

The Captain thought that about the most idiotic move of the trip.

"You little fool," he laughed when he managed to find words. "That sort of trash we can have for nothing when we get to Malaita and kill a few niggers—" He never finished his good natured rebuke. The delighted girl placed the ornaments in his hand. He looked at them with his eyes almost popping out of his head.

Among other rubbish both ornaments contained a piece of polished bone, oval in shape, and about two inches long. Skilfully set in each piece of bone were two large pearls.

Now it was his turn to be excited.

"Guerney, look at the trade the little sly fox has made!" he shouted in delight, handing the ornaments to the equally pop-eyed supercargo.

Mr. Guerney was an expert on pearls. No jeweler could pass better judgment on such treasures. He examined the pearls critically and emitted a soft whistle.

"Young lady," he said, handing the ornaments back to her, "I must compliment you on your remarkably sharp eye and quick wit. The largest of them is worth at

least sixty pounds, and the smallest no less than forty-five. They are rose-coloured and perfect."

Great excitement now reigned. A knife was the native's most coveted possession. The other four savages wanted to trade off their ear ornaments for similar knives, and in the tepid heat the Captain as well as Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Guerney almost sweated blood trying to make them understand that the ornaments must contain pearls to be of any value.

They finally understood, but then they wanted to swim ashore immediately, as they evidently knew of the existence of other such trinkets. This, of course, could not be permitted, as the native population in shore were enjoying their *kava* dreams, and it would have resulted in a riot if they had been prematurely and boisterously awakened. After a considerable amount of gesticulating and several soothing applications of rum the five on board finally quieted down. However, they kept up a continuous chatter among themselves and were alternately pointing first at one exposed reef on the Taunu Shoals, then at another, as if they were debating the location of some particular spot.

"I'll bet anything that is where the pearls came from, Captain," said Mr. Guerney.

The Captain thoughtfully nodded his head.

"Yes; I think you are right, Guerney," he conceded. "I have no doubt that these niggers know of some more pearls among the tribes, but they also know where they grow. What I am thinking of now is, how we could persuade the rest of them to stop their damnable feasting long enough to do some diving before any other ships show up and spoil our hash for us."

Mr. Guerney suddenly had thrown aside the cloak of the gentleman. The man who now stood before us was

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Mr. Guerney, the shrewd trader. In a brisk business-like manner he seated himself in front of the Captain and outlined a plan that had developed in his mind.

"In the first place, Captain," he proceeded, "how many prisoners have they left?"

"Oh," the Captain replied, very much interested, "I should say about forty-three or four, including the Malaita devil-priests."

"And that means about how many more feasts?"

"Well, they slaughtered eleven last night," the Captain reasoned, "but as they start to grow less they'll probably start to economize; so I should judge it will mean five to seven more spreeds."

"Very well," snapped Mr. Guerney. "Now, I've always heard that the Malaitans are good divers. Don't you think that, with proper inducements we might buy some of those fellows and make them dive for us? You see, here's my idea: None of those fellows have ever had a gun, so a gun would mean the world to them. Now, if we give them some of the muzzle-loading Springfields, with powder and shot, which we have among our trade goods, and show them how to use them, I think they will listen to reason."

The Captain had been staring at Mr. Guerney as if he had only just discovered that the man really had a head on his shoulders.

"By God! Guerney," he said with admiration showing in his eyes, "you ain't much in a fight but you sure got a head. I think your scheme will work. Of course, there are the devil-devil doctors to be reckoned with. You see, they will have to give up the prisoners—none of the others can go into the temple—but maybe you can think up some way of fixing them."

"You see they don't recognize anybody except their own gods or devils or whoever they try to please; and

after the prisoners are once in the temple they have to be sacrificed."

Mr. Guerney pondered over this, gazing at the shore, while all eyes were riveted upon him—all eyes except Cathryn's. She sat down upon the forward poop taffrail, dangling her feet and staring at the jabbering quintette of savages as if without interest in the subject under discussion. But after giving her a casual glance as she took up that pose, I found it difficult to keep my eyes off her. There was a slight frown upon her handsome features, and the look in her eyes plainly indicated that her pretty head was not being used merely as an ornament. Somewhere within a few miles from our anchorage fortunes were hidden by the waves, and she was aware of it as much as anyone else—that little dynamo under her black-brown hair was working to capacity.

Suddenly Mr. Guerney broke the tense silence.

"Captain," he said with a shake of the head, "I'm afraid we are up against the most difficult of all obstacles—ignorant superstition. There is but one way to fight it, and that is by force."

The Captain just grunted his disapproval.

"Hell!" he replied disappointedly, "we have gained more by our little diplomatic move of last night than a fleet of gun-luggers could gain in a month. Don't let's give up. Come, now, all of you; get your thinkers going! It may mean a quick and rich trip." Then turning his glance toward Cathryn, he queried: "Well, what say, little thinking-machine?"

When Mr. Guerney had uttered the word "superstition," I had noticed a lightning-like flash in the girl's eyes; she had absorbed the conversation, while that wonderful little brain was planning ahead of everybody.

"Superstition!" She uttered the word as if to herself.

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"That is what we have to fight, and we must fight it with superstition," she continued while the Captain looked at her with expectant admiration. "What is needed is some kind of a demonstration which their priests would interpret as a warning from their gods that they have feasted enough for the present. Such a demonstration, following our offer to buy their prisoners, would undoubtedly convince them that their gods want them to accept our proposal."

Amazement and respect for this wonderful little creature could be read upon every face.

"Oh, women, women!" the Captain mused; then turning toward me, he added triumphantly: "There, now! Remember what I told you? Rocks ahead! Lord, but they are clever!"

Having thus relieved himself, he again addressed the modestly smiling girl:

"Well now, little lady, I believe it was a lucky stroke of Fate that brought you on board. With your generalship we are going to make the richest trip that's been known, and you won't lose by it. So now we'll just listen to you, and what you say goes!"

The girl's unfeigned modesty only increased our respect for her.

"Oh, Captain, you must not flatter me like that," she smiled at him. "If you do I won't be able to think. I believe I have a plan, but when you hear it you will probably all laugh at me, for it seems somewhat foolish."

"Don't you be afraid of anyone laughing at you," the Captain encouraged her. "The first man who laughs will walk the plank, so go ahead. I know there won't be a hitch in your plan."

"All right!" she said resignedly. "I might as well make a fool out of myself now as at any other time. Hearing the mention of gunpowder, ignorance and super-

stition, and knowing something about their method of feasting, put this foolish idea into my head.

"Now, when any of the chiefs come on board this afternoon, it would be a good plan to follow Mr. Guerney's suggestion and offer to buy the prisoners from them for guns—which they will probably be anxious to possess—at the same time somehow giving them to understand that the gods, or whatever they worship, have given us a sign that they must trade with us now or otherwise their High Place will be destroyed. This warning might carry some weight with the chiefs, but I have no doubt that their priests will require a practical demonstration of what may happen. Captain, you probably have noticed that they had a pile of firewood lying near their pits. My idea is, to smuggle a few pieces of wood, hollowed-out and filled with gunpowder, into that pile so they will explode when thrown into the fire. In their ignorance, they may consider that as a warning that their feast must end. And now," she concluded with a smile, "I am ready to walk the plank."

"You'll walk no plank. Your plan is practical and simple," the Captain assured her. "The hardest part of it will be to get the loaded wood mixed in their kindling, but we'll do it even if I have to sneak up there alone. We'll start right in now and fix up the wood-bombs."

He began at once to give orders preparatory to the execution of her plan.

CHAPTER XII

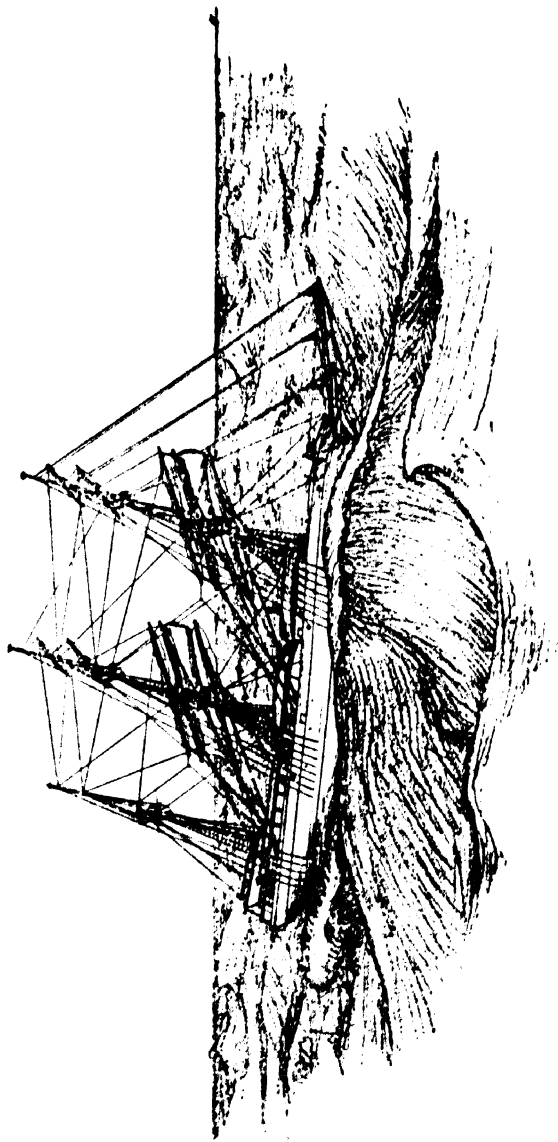
WHITE STRATEGY AND BLACK SUPERSTITION

MR. GUERNEY," Captain McPurden commanded, "give those five niggers all the rum they need to put them to sleep. And you three white cannibals"—meaning Bunk, Cockney and me—"get ready to go in shore with the boat and cut a few pieces of wood about the size that's on their pile—you can cut it right near the beach among the mango or parua bushes. Mr. Kennedy, you know where the carpenter tools are, in the lazaret. Hunt up a couple of inch and a quarter bits. Now, then, boys, let's drink to the ship's angel and wish success to her scheme, and get to work."

We had no difficulty in selecting a few branches about two inches in diameter—approximately the size of the natives' firewood—and brought them on board, where they were cut into two-foot lengths. The ends were bored out with the carpenter's bits, then filled with gunpowder wrapped in paper to protect it from the moisture in the wood. The holes were carefully plugged with wood, and our bombs were ready except for the planting of them among the fuel piles.

During their everyday life the islanders never used wood as fuel. They always used cocoanut husks and shells, but when building a fire in the pits to heat the stones they used wood only, as it required a hotter and more lasting fire for this purpose than a husk fire. This we had learned during our night on the High Place, and it would help us now in planting our bombs.

The Captain decided that the best plan would be for the



The Trading Bark *Emma P.*, on which, as Second Mate, Captain Raabe made Frequent Trading Trips to the Solomon Islands in the 70's. Drawn by the Author.

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three of us who were partly familiar with the lay of the land to make an attempt to approach the High Place from the side of the bone-pit, and to make an immediate start, as during the early afternoon the place would be deserted. So after a hasty meal—each armed with a bush-knife and pocket flask of rum—Bunk, Cockney and I were set ashore, each of us carrying four of our bombs.

We lost no time in entering the thicket on the beach and soon found out that without the bush-knives we would not have had the ghost of a chance to get through, for we had almost to hack our way along through creeping vines and ferns, besides climbing over large rocks and huge decaying tree trunks. But after about half an hour of this laborious work, fortune smiled on us. We came upon a wildpig run, which made the going fairly easy for the greatest part of our journey.

The last hundred yards, however, proved the hardest, as the incline was so steep that, without obtaining a footing against rocks and small trees and ferns, we would have been unable to make the ascent. It took us fully forty-five minutes to go this short distance, but our labours were rewarded. Through the thick underbrush we could see the back of the cook-shed looming up above us. We had missed our bearing in the dense jungle; the side which we had aimed for lay at right angles to the one we had reached; nevertheless, we were near our objective.

Then came disappointment. We had expected to find the place deserted. Instead, the devil-devil demons were there, leading some of the prisoners with cocoanut fibre ropes tied to their necks and the points of spears at their backs. The poor wretches were carrying wood for their own roasting. There was nothing for us to do but to lie in wait and watch for our chance.

For almost an hour we lay there in the underbrush,

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anxiously waiting, while the insects made life almost unbearable. We had to be very careful not to make any noise for those devils would have only welcomed the opportunity of securing the charmed meat of the white man.

At last, the fuel piles seemed to be sufficiently replenished, for the guards with their prisoners disappeared down the path leading to the temple.

We stole from behind the cook-shed to plant our bombs.

The descent was easy, as our path was already cut, and in a half-hour's time we again saw the beach before us. But another obstacle then presented itself, and again we had to stop and wait in the bushes. Several native dugouts were alongside the *Emma P.* This time we were compelled to hide until after sundown before we dared to come out into the open. There on the beach we waited almost an hour after dark, expecting a boat. We did not dare to hail the ship as that would have betrayed us. Finally, after being driven to desperation by the awful noise which had started above us, we launched one of the smaller dugouts and came alongside.

There were joy and relief on board when we loomed up out of the darkness. Our shipmates had almost given us up as lost. They were just embarking upon a "quarter-deck-parley" to decide as to the most practical expedition for determining our whereabouts, when we broke in on them.

The fires were already blazing on the High Place, and a confusion of questions as to the success of our pilgrimage were shot at us over the rail, before we could even board. But we never answered any of them. Fate spoke for us. There upon the High Place we saw a sudden shower of burning embers, scattering skyward like rockets on a rampage. Then came a volley of fire-cracker explosions, re-echoing in the darkness.

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All hands stood frozen to the deck, as if they really ascribed the spectacle to a supernatural omen.

Pandemonium broke loose in shore as we were climbing on board.

Mr. Kennedy hurriedly dispatched four men in our boat to tow the canoe back to the beach. We did not want that telltale thing alongside.

The tom-toms stopped, and in their place we heard only a babel of yells and howls from the frightened and excited natives, while the High Place was almost completely enveloped in darkness.

Then pandemonium broke loose on board. Everybody was hugging everybody else. Cathryn was fairly dancing with joy and forgot herself so far as to hug us—while the Captain experienced great difficulty in making his command—to splice the main brace—heard. None of us had expected the “message from the gods” to come as quickly as it did.

The noise in shore was spreading like an epidemic. Howls and wails were intermingled with the cries of frightened birds, until the whole island seemed to be in a delirious uproar. The racket spread to the beach, and before an hour had passed we were surrounded by a swarm of canoes filled with frightened natives all yelling, “Tambo kay kay,” until the “royal yacht” came alongside with the four chiefs and the wise interpreter.

The latter now looked wiser than ever, for during our stay in shore Mr. Guernsey had presented him with a pair of green eye-glasses and an old stove-pipe hat which he now wore with most hilarious dignity. He would have brought down the house in a musical comedy. His dignity, however, was offset by his great excitement as he clambered on board, shouting:

“Tambo fella M’laita, swaffum rum!”

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He was followed by the chiefs, all of them frightened out of their wits. Then the light of our lanterns disclosed six large war canoes with the ugly painted faces and bodies of the devil-devil priests. The war canoes came alongside, and before we could catch our breath, forty-one bound and miserably frightened wretches were passed over our gangway.

If it had not been for our tangles we would have been fairly swamped under an avalanche of black figures so anxious were they to get rid of their most decidedly "tambod" prisoners.

It took more than two hours before order could be restored, and we managed to pacify them with enough rum to shoo them in shore. The Captain, however, insisted upon having at least six of their armed warriors stay on board to watch over the prisoners, so that most of us could get a little rest.

On the following morning it was not long after sunrise before the beach came to life. There had been no *kava* debauching—possibly the *kava* had gone where it should, up into the air and smoke—and the entire population was about at an early hour. The goods which the white man had brought interested them now and they were anxious to trade. The chiefs had not forgotten the promised rifles and were on board in due time to do their shopping early, bringing with them the much bespectacled and stove-pipe-hatted interpreter. Even seven devil-devil doctors came on board in all their devilish painted glory. Each of them expected one of the cherished rifles, and the interpreter opened negotiations with the announcement:

"Stof along catchum devil club."

Polly was kept busy, puffing, panting and sweating while he made several trips below bringing up the guns and several packages of ammunition for them, as Bunk, Cockney

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and the able little ship's angel acted as instructors to teach their eager pupils the art of loading and firing old muskets.

It did not take them long to learn, as they paid strict attention to their lessons—all of them except one of the devil-devil doctors, who, as I happened to notice, could not keep his eyes off of the fat little Polly.

So I said to Polly:

"That fellow there with the handsome features seems to have taken a liking to you."

"Do you think so?" was Polly's listless reply, while the interpreter also seemed to notice the priest's fancy for Polly and blurted out:

"He fella deffil like um fella fat!"

Polly's hair seemed to stand up straight from fright. He did not seem to run or move otherwise. He simply ceased to be where he was and no amount of persuasion or threats could bring him on deck again whenever there were natives in sight. Thus ended a promising pirate's career.

When the instructions were over, the chiefs assured the Captain again that we had the freedom of the Island, that any of the native divers were free to dive for us and that any of their subjects who might be objectionable to us would be subjected to the rather effective treatment of—"No gottum mo head."

We, of course, in turn, expressed our heart-felt sympathy for that rather ungodly interruption of their feast at the hands of the cruel, thoughtless gods whereupon they went ashore to try out their marksmanship.

Twenty minutes later we saw natives clambering up cocoanut trees like wild cats, and running around the beach while the chiefs and priests took pot shots at them.

* * * * *

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Dull adventureless weeks followed. More pearl ornaments were discovered among the natives and duly traded in for knives and other more or less useful trinkets or rum. The pearl diving was not very interesting except when there happened to be an occasional encounter with a shark, a giant octopus or a sting-ray. Despite those incidents we did not lose a man, although the Taunu Shoals, with their numerous deep crevices and exposed reefs were fairly alive with marine monsters.

Our Malaita divers proved themselves to be an excellent investment, and there appeared to be no enmity between them and the Guas while they were engaged in peaceful occupation. Together they brought up some wonderful specimens of shell, which, in these virgin grounds, was "running thick"—and the thickness established its value.

Whenever opportunity offered itself, we of the regular crew did some diving ourselves. We all were powerful swimmers, and Cathryn was second to none. She loved this kind of life and was like a mermaid. Thus several weeks passed like days in a pleasant, carefree world that we had all to ourselves, while the various trade goods in our hold were gradually being replaced by valuable cargo in shell, coral, ebony and sandal-wood, and the wealth accumulated in pearl began to assume the proportions of a vast fortune.

Chief Ugu was a strategist. His able statesmanship had convinced the natives that more could be gained by being on friendly terms with us than by fighting us. He even assured us that our Malaitans could remain on the Island, unmolested, after our departure. In fact, peace had settled down upon this previously bloody shore, so much so that Captain McPurden and Mr. Kennedy began to have evil forebodings that something appalling would

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be bound to happen before we could conclude our enterprise. It certainly was an eventful trip.

Seven weeks of peace and harmony had passed. It was a beautiful clear morning after a severe squall during the night before. Our diving crew was on the way toward the shoals in their dugouts. Captain McPurden and Mr. Kennedy were sitting in deck chairs on the cabin top, enjoying an after breakfast pipe. Pacing the poop deck, taking a smoke while waiting for Cathryn who wanted to go to the shoals with me, I was good-naturedly laughing off several jocular remarks about a juvenile love affair, thrown my way by the Captain and Chief Mate.

Suddenly they stopped their joking. Mr. Kennedy fixed his gaze upon some spot on the horizon, and then, pointing in that direction with his pipe, he said:

"Damned, if that don't look like a sail, Captain."

The Captain followed the direction indicated.

"It sure does," he agreed, "but it ain't no schooner. It looks more like a square sail."

"Probably a junk," Mr. Kennedy affirmed; "but what's a junk got to do round here!"

Pirates, was my immediate thought.

"Get me my glass, Harry," the Captain said to me. "That ain't a junk either. I think I see the truck of a fore an' aft mast, too. That must be a brigantine."

I handed him the telescope, and after turning it upon the object in question, he nodded his head and murmured:

"Sure, it's a brigantine, Kennedy—look for yourself."

"Then it's the *Tinacula*," said Mr. Kennedy, taking the glass. "Sure, it's Van, the damned black-hearted—What other brigantine would be coming this way?"

"That's what I thought," the Captain said with resignation. "Van Asvelt blackbirding! I knew it was too good to last."

The name sounded familiar to me.

"Captain," I said, "is that the fellow who had Polly on board?"

"That's him!" the Captain growled, "and a worse scoundrel than Van Asvelt never lived. It isn't his blackbirding that makes him so mean for there's Oliver, for instance. He's a blackbirder but still he has some conscience. But this fellow, Van—well, he won't do a job unless it can be done in a dirty way."

"Yes;" Mr. Kennedy added, "and if he can horn in here now an' spoil the good work we done, an' antagonize the niggers again, he'll be right in his glory."

"Well," I blundered on, "can't we chase him away? We got here first."

"Ugu can," Mr. Kennedy said, nodding; "he and the other chiefs, but that means bloodshed."

Just then Cathryn appeared upon the scene. She had heard the last few words and looked at us in alarm.

"What now?" she reproved us, trying to appear jocular. "It looks as if the quarterdeck's in session for a council of war. Why that gruesome talk about bloodshed and all that sort of thing on such a glorious morning?"

"There it's coming!" I said, pointing toward the brigantine whose forecourse was now showing upon the horizon.

"Yes, little girl," the Captain said sadly, "maybe you'll get a chance to hear something about the *Iorano* now, 'cause that yellow cur that's coming there is one of the trio—Bully Hayes, Van Asvelt and Dundee Mike—the tricolour of the South Pacific, as Lieutenant Cuét of the *Buvet* calls them—black for Bully Hayes, yellow for Van, red for red-headed Mike. The French try to keep Mike away from the Marquesas if they can, but there's no government here, so he goes the limit in these waters."

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"Yes," she said with anger in her eyes, "Captain Dundee had red hair all right."

The four of us were watching the brigantine as she went about—it was a shore breeze and she had head wind to put in here. There was no question it was the *Tinacula*, Mr. Kennedy said.

"I am going in shore and find Ugu and his wizard," the Captain said, jumping out of his chair. "Strap on two guns and drive four of the bums into the cutter, Harry, an' take me in shore."

"May I go, too, Captain?" the girl asked. "That will make our odds more even against the four."

She always had a soothing effect upon him.

"Listen to bloodthirsty little sure shot," he laughed, good-naturedly patting her cheek. "Sure you can go. Wherever you go there's luck."

"By the time I get back I won't be able to get a hat to fit me," she laughed as I started to get the boat crew.

Before our boat was manned by the repugnant quartette, ten armed natives, Ugu among them, came running down the beach. Hurriedly manning one of the large canoes, they started toward us. We could see that they were very much excited. They kept up a continuous chatter while paddling, and even when they were still a hundred yards away Ugu, in the bow, started shouting "tambo tambo," while pointing at the brigantine which now was in full view on the horizon.

"Tambo," the Captain agreed, nodding his head and motioning them to come on board. "All time tambo *Tinacula*," he assured them as they were clambering to the deck, so excited that two of them received nasty cuts on our tangles, and Cathryn had to play the good Samaritan with bandages.

"Shootum!" Ugu shouted excitedly, brandishing his

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new gun, and before we could catch our breath he fired a shot at the brigantine, which, however, was like throwing a spit-ball at the moon, as the distance was far too great for the carrying power of his rifle.

The other natives got so excited that they started a war dance on deck. This performance, by a lot of savages who were now armed to the teeth, caused considerable consternation among the crowd forward, whose only usefulness had been thus far confined to the cleaning, lugging and stowing of cargo.

Two more canoes, crowded with armed warriors, now came alongside. Trouble was brewing fast. All of them were about on the point of jumping out of their skins with lust for battle. It certainly looked as if they had some old score to settle with the approaching brigantine, and they lost no time in letting us know that we were expected to be their allies.

One of the canoes, however, fortunately brought our dignified stove-pipe-hat friend, and with his masterful aid as interpreter we finally managed to calm down the over-zealous warriors, and to make them understand that, in the event of the blackbirding raid which they feared, we could prove ourselves more valuable allies if they would go ashore and lie in ambush. This they eventually agreed upon after the renewed assurance that we would remain "sam-sam along fella black."

Our regulars, who had gone to the shoals in charge of our diving crew, must have noticed that all was not well, for we could see the boats and canoes now returning as fast as oars, paddles and sails could drive them. Ten minutes after they reached the ship, the *Tinacula*—for it was no other—dropped anchor a few hundred yards away from us, but nearer in to the shore.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MASTER OF THE *TINACULA*

THE *Tinacula* was a smart little craft of about two hundred tons, and if it had not been for her patched sails and her tangles she might have easily been mistaken for a yacht with her trim lines and graceful sheer. The saucy pitch of her jib boom and bowsprit with its long dolphinstriker, the rake of her masts, the graceful curve of the clipper stem and the long overhung counter at once gave one the impression of the time-honoured writers' term, "a low, rakish piratical-looking craft."

"Isn't she pretty," Cathryn said to me admiringly as we watched them swing their boats to cover. "She reminds me so much of the *Iorano*, only she is so much bigger, and not a schooner."

The Captain had overheard the remark. He snorted his disdain.

"Yes; she reminds me of some of those handsome fellows with a degenerate brain," he grumbled, then expectantly: "Aha! they are launching a boat. I s'pose that cuss will come on board now to parley and snoop around! Damn his rotten black soul!"

Then, watching a man clad in white trousers and a red shirt follow two apparently Chinese sailors into the boat, he said more calmly: "Yes; that's him now. You better get out of sight, little girl. I am going to quiz him, and I don't want him to see you."

Van Asvelt's sailors were good oarsmen. They slid

alongside without a scrape. You had to give the devil his due. Van came up our ladder like a cat.

He was a man of medium height, rather stockily built and with handsome features, but his pale blue, shifty eyes were set too close to that aquiline nose to inspire confidence. They were continuously shifting about as if he tried to avoid looking at anybody and, at the same time, take in everything at once. His yellow, curly hair left no doubt but that this was the man who represented the yellow in that tricolour of the South Seas.

There seemed to be a sneer in his grin as he extended his hand toward Captain McPurden, with a forced joviality.

"Hello, Mac!"

The grin became actually fiendish as the Captain did not bother to take the proffered hand, and the curl of Van's upper lip partly exposed his fangs as if he were about to snarl.

"Well," Captain McPurden growled, by way of greeting; "what brings you around?"

"Same's you, Mac; same's you," was the curt reply. Then coming right to the point: "I thought I saw a diving crew working down the shoals—that's a new one on me. Find anything?"

Captain McPurden knew that there was no sense in trying to withhold the truth from this sharper.

"Yes; struck it good and rich," he acknowledged frankly, while a queer light seemed to gleam in the other's eyes; "shell running thickest I've seen, an' quite a few pebbles.* Getting sandal an' ebony, too. Old Ugu and I are first cousins now, even had dinner with him one night, an' some of my crew, too."

Van Asvelt's interest became more acute with the men-

* Pearls.

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tion of each item. His eyes betrayed more than his words admitted.

"The Hell you say!" He hailed the discovery of the shell beds with genuine surprise. "Well, I ain't particular about havin' dinner with Ugu, but I guess I'll look over the shoals myself, now that I hear it's worth while. I don't want any of Ugu's sandal an' ebony neither, but—there's a friend o' mine running a mine in 'Stralia who wants a little help. I kind o' promised him that old Ugu would supply some o' it."

The last words were spoken with another fang-exposing grin—which left no doubt as to the real object of his mission—while his eyes were roving all over the ship as if he was looking for someone.

Captain McPurden's eyes, however, had been fastened upon the *Tinacula*; thus the other's malevolent expression escaped him. The brigantine seemed to show excessive freeboard for a vessel which should be loaded with trade goods, and he remarked casually:

"What's the matter, Van? Are you in ballast an' carrying jewelry for trade goods? You ain't got any load!"

Van's grin was meaner than ever as he replied:

"Hell! I don't need any trade goods—I got a bunch o' Bully's crew aboard."

His last words might as well have been followed up with the advice: "Put that in your pipe and smoke it," his grin was so sardonic.

"Well, Van," Captain McPurden drawled ironically; "I kind o' think you'll need trade goods. Don't depend too much on Bully's gang helping you."

"By the way, while I think of it," he added almost casually; "did you ever hear of a schooner named *Iorano*?"

At mention of that name Van's eyes flashed furtively all over the deck again.

"*Iorano?*" He repeated the name as if trying to refresh his memory. "No, never heard of her"; then quickly changing the subject: "They told me that you had quite a lively time mustering on Rennell. You must a' got a fine bunch o' shark-bait there. Guess I'll go take a look at them." With those words he started to walk forward.

Van Asvelt evidently underestimated Captain McPurden's intelligence. The Captain knew only too well the type of men we had forward, and he could guess what Van's mission in "looking them over" would be. After a moment he decided that enough meaningless conversation had already been exchanged between them, and his face took on the expression of a bulldog's about to bite. When he spoke again there was no casual drawl in his voice.

"Van!" he thundered; "I got enough of this! You damned yellow cur; get aboard your tub and heave in your hook and clear out o' this. You ain't going to take a shell off the beach here without trade goods, and you're not going to chum with them bums forward, or slip them a gun. I'm here to see that you don't. Now—*get!* There's a breeze for you!"

Van Asvelt stopped and turned back. It was quite plain to him that he was not fooling Captain McPurden, but he kept his self-composure and with mocking good nature he replied:

"Them's kind o' hard words to use on an old friend, Mac. You must a' joined up with the sky nav'gators since I saw you last." Then as he reached the gangway he fairly snarled: "Ain't you going to put a cross in the old flag?"

With those words he jumped into his boat and pushed

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off, but evidently decided that a cutting parting shot would fit the occasion, for over his shoulder he flung at us the most severe insult that a deep water man knows:

"You're a damn bunch o' soldiers!!"

Mr. Kennedy fumed.

"Soldiers!" He fairly spat out the word in disgust. "Why in Hell didn't the——call us that while he was within my reach? I'll make a soldier out o' him when I get him!"

And Mr. Kennedy was just the man who could—slow to anger, but—oh, what a wallop he had!

We watched Van Asvelt board the *Tinacula* and saw the crew of the brigantine crowd around him. There must have been more than twenty-five men on board of the little vessel, and, in spite of the distance, we could see that each of them carried a rifle, with a pistol strapped around his waist—evidence that they were not bent on a peaceful mission. They seemed to hold council, and Captain McPurden decided that we would have to make a move before they gained too great an advantage. True enough, we had more men on board than they, but one thing was certain—eighteen of our crew could not be counted on in this emergency. They were, in fact, liable to prove a detriment, for, once they were armed, we would have had to keep our rifles on them instead of on the enemy.

This thought must have been on all our minds while we stood there silently watching the brigantine.

Suddenly Captain McPurden sprang into action:

"Hell!" he said, "standing around here with our tongues in our mouths ain't going to get us anywhere. We got to act, and do it damn quick before that cuss gets the drop on us. The bums'll have to go ashore, first of all, and we'll have to plant them so they'll have to fight or——!"

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He started to give hurried orders:

"Kennedy! Swing out three o' the cover boats an' lower away!

"Guerney! Break out guns an' stuff for all hands! Come on, boys, bring 'em up, and grab a cutlass for each of you reg'lars."

Mr. Kennedy had already whipped the renegade gang for'ard into action at the boat-tackles, and three boats took the water, while we were hustling rifles and ammunition on deck.

"Send up a dozen or so of bush-knives, Guerney," the Captain ordered down the companionway as an after-thought. "I'll make some o' the blacks a present of them. Now's the time they can use them."

Sixteen of the frightened beach-combers were herded into the four boats, unarmed—they had to man the oars. The guns and ammunition were placed in the stern of each boat, in charge of one of the regular crew, well armed. Then the Captain stepped to the gangway. Before he descended he said with a gesture that left no room for misunderstanding:

"Mr. Kennedy, when you find it necessary, give each o' them two bums I left on board a gun, and put them where they have to fight. If any of Van's boats come near, shoot, and don't waste a shot. I left the best shots with you."

As he descended he beckoned to me.

"Come on, Harry," he said; "I am going to put you in shore with this gang and test your generalship!" Then, with grim humour, he added: "You better kiss that girl goodbye—you may never see her again. Your bridges will be burned behind you!"

Strange as it may seem, during all this activity, which, at the most, took only fifteen minutes, no apparent move

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had been made on board of the *Tinacula* Van Asvelt evidently had a trump up his sleeve.

When we landed, the beach-combers had to be disembarked with threats. They were between two fires and they did not know what to think of the situation. If they entertained the idea of making a rush and overwhelming us six, they showed the good judgment the Captain had credited them with. They knew that the bushes were fairly bristling with spears and arrows, and—no doubt—none of them were crack shots.

During the many friendly visits which Ugu had paid us he must have noticed that we had good cause to mistrust the crew we had for'ard, because—the islanders being quite intelligent—Ugu was exceptionally bright. He evidently understood the Captain's strategic move when he saw the gang herded in shore minus their guns. As soon as we landed, half a dozen warriors, and our friend the wizard, came out of the bush and gave us to understand that they would carry the guns and lead the now visibly trembling beach-combers into the bush.

This was exactly what the Captain had wanted. He immediately gave me instructions:

"You stay with this gang, and keep 'Plug-hat' alongside of you. Through him you can make the niggers understand. It don't take much to make 'em savvy 'cause they got good heads on 'em. Our gang ain't going to get hold of a gun unless it's necessary to shoot—I don't think it will be today—but I want that gang off the ship, 'cause Van may take it in his head to start something tonight. Now, see to it that the blacks keep their eyes on the bums, and if you give 'em a gun, be sure to have one or two of the blacks behind each with a spear in the back. Good luck to you. You may be here for a couple of days. We got to go back to the ship."

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Pointing at the bush-knives, he said to Plug-hat:

"Givum along black fella." Then, pointing at me, he added: "He fella no tambo."

As I watched them sculling the four boats back to the ship, the gravity of the situation did not prevent me from seeing the humour of the fact that now I was an officer in a cannibal army. The blacks must have seen the amusing part of it, too. They were grinning from ear to ear—an evidence of joviality on their part which did not in the least seem to reassure the cutthroats in our charge.

In fact, the absence of the Captain encouraged one of them to voice a protest with unrestrained fervour.

"Say, fellow!" he demanded surlily, "what's the idea of the Old Man putting us in shore with niggers an' without guns? Supposin' they start in on us now, what chance have we got?"

"Don't worry," I said, sternly; "they are not going to hurt you as long as you fellows don't start something. The idea is to make you fellows fire on your friend Van Asvelt if he tries to bring his crew ashore. Besides that, if you fellows think you can get away with me, you'll find that there are more than a hundred armed blacks in the bush not far from here."

As if to verify this statement, Ugu, with a score of his warriors, now came out of the bush, and when the beach-combers caught sight of those wicked-looking, buzz-saw-toothed, ironwood spear-points, they stood as if hypnotized. They did not utter another word. Their eyes seemed to see nothing but those spears, which were to be kept close to their backs as soon as they got hold of a gun. Without question the warriors could see that these fellows were yellow all the way through, for contempt could be read on every fierce, grinning face. The blacks

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would have gladly made "long pig" out of all of them if it had not been for our treaty with Ugu.

"He fella tambo? He fella stoff along bus-sh?"

Ugu addressed me, first pointing at the frightened whites, and then at the bush.

"He fella tambo," I conceded nodding my head; "fella big tambo."

"No tambo kai-kai." Ugu laughed as he motioned them toward the bush, his last words so frightening the whites that they started babbling among themselves, nervously questioning each other as to why the skipper could not have sent guns in shore for the natives to use.

"That's an easy one," I volunteered by way of enlightening them. "The skipper knows that those fellows can't handle a gun, especially, a breech-loader, and there's no time to teach them. Their spears and arrows wouldn't be much good against Van's crackshots."

"I don't know how to handle a gun," was the rejoinder from at least half a dozen voices.

"Then I'm sorry for you fellows," I said; "you'd better refresh your memories. These blacks here would neither believe nor understand you."

"Well, this is a Hell of a way to treat white men," one of them groaned, sitting down upon a fallen tree-trunk.

I really felt sorry for the poor wretches, although I knew in my heart that any one of them would cut my throat if given a safe chance. But I thought there would be no harm in cheering them up a little. So I said to them:

"Now, look here, fellows, I have nothing against you and don't want any of you to get hurt, but I'm not going to take a chance and trust you. All you have to do is, remember that you belong on board of the bark and that you got money coming to you there——"

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"Hell! Quit your preachin'," one of them interrupted me surlily. "We'd get more'n that if Van——"

"Shut up! You talk too damn much!" one of the others cautioned him quickly.

"You might as well let him finish now," I retorted. "I heard all that's necessary."

Then, addressing Ugu and Plug-hat, I pointed at these two individuals and said: "He fella much big tambo!"

But I saw that I, too, had nearly talked too much. One of the warriors, a giant in stature, his ponderous muscles tautening like cables and his spear thrust forward, advanced toward the two wretches. Looking at me menacingly, he asked:

"Catchum?"

"No, no! Tambo! Tambo!" I yelled, grabbing his spear-point.

The giant, with relaxing muscles, shrugged his shoulders as if to say: "You whites are certainly a puzzle!"

The other natives, including Ugu and Plug-hat, seemed to be right in their glory as they stood or sat around, leaning upon their spears and watching those miserable beach-combers, who, they knew, were wolves to the weak and lambs to the strong.

Thus the day wore on in watchful waiting. The brigantine and the bark could be seen through the foliage, but there was not a sign of activity on either vessel. Each apparently expected the other to make a hostile move. Native women came with roast pig and shark meat, wrapped in leaves, also calabashes filled with luke-warm water. The food tasted delicious, as I was hungry, having eaten nothing since my early breakfast; but the beach-combers would not touch a morsel.

I wanted to light my pipe, but Ugu would not permit this; he gave me to understand that we were too near to

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the edge of the bushes and that the smoke might betray our hiding-place. He did not know that the whites did not possess the keen sense of detection inherent in him and the rest of these primitive sons of nature. He and his warriors, were, however, very much interested when, to pass those seemingly endless hours, I started to instruct them in the mysteries of the breechloading Chassepots.

Evening came, but still peace hovered over the bay. Some of the savages lay down to rest while others remained on watch, standing erect—motionless for hours.

Those who rested had a peculiar way of making themselves comfortable. Each one made for himself two bundles of sticks, ferns, palm leaves, etc., about eight to ten inches in diameter and about three feet long, and placing them on the ground the proper distance apart, he would lie across them on his back, with one bundle under the back of his neck, and the other under the back of his knees. I have used this method of resting many times since and have found it as comfortable as the softest bed.

This night, however, I did not sleep. I was worrying about the consequences in case the watchers should doze. Trying to solve the problem of how Van Asvelt expected to take alive such wonderful fighting machines as those men now gathered around me, was more than sufficient to keep me awake, sitting alone, as I was, on an old cocoanut-tree trunk, watching some of the sleepers rise with almost clock-like regularity every couple of hours to replace some of the watchers.

Thus the still, tropical night passed quickly, but nothing happened on the bay. By noon on the following day the monotony of all this began to bore me. I made up my mind to take a short stroll but was stopped by one of the beach-combers. He begged in a whispering voice:

“Say, mate; for Christ’s sake don’t go away or the

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niggers'll stick us, sure's Hell. I dozed off last night an' dreamt they had me on one o' them stickers, roastin' me."

"They don't roast you on a stick around here," I replied with indifference; "they bake you in a pit. I'll ask the chief to let you stand by and watch how it's done when the rest of you get stewed."

"Hully gee! Quit that talk or I'll go nuts," he yelled, his eyes popping out of his head.

"He fella talkum?" Ugu asked me, much interested.

"He fella no likum black fella stop along kai-kai fella," I answered, and by their knowing grins I could see that they had progressed with their English since our arrival.

I sat down again on my tree trunk, and, feeling drowsy during the latter part of the afternoon, I dropped off into a doze.

Suddenly I felt myself shaken by the shoulder, and looking up I saw that it was one the natives.

"Gottum rum! Gottum rum!"

He rejoiced, all excited, as he pointed toward the beach where Mr. Kennedy with four of our men had landed, bringing a demijohn of rum in shore.

I came out to receive the welcome gift.

"Well, big fella, White Chief," Mr. Kennedy greeted me jovially; "fella marster skipper thought we better fetchum flenny rum so you can keep the niggers good-natured. How are the swabs? Any of them ready for the stew-pit yet?"

"No," I said, "but tell the skipper that some of them sure will cash in before tomorrow morning—they'll die from fright. And tell him I'm feasting on the fat of the land." Glad to be able to talk to someone again, I asked: "Mr. Kennedy, how does this fellow Van ever expect to catch some of those niggers alive?"

"I thought that would worry you," he said. "He uses

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stinkpots on 'em. That's why he has the chinks on board. They know how to throw them and dope the whole bloody bunch, if you let them come near enough. So, if he tries to come in, make the bums shoot before he gets too close——”

He stopped abruptly, and, jumping back into the boat, shouted for the men to row back to the ship as fast as they could.

Alongside the *Tinacula* two boats were being hurriedly manned with eight men to each boat.

“He's trying to cut us off,” Mr. Kennedy called back at me, while the men put every ounce of their strength into the oars.

It was an exciting race. Our boat was making a straight line for the bark. Mr. Kennedy was in the stern with his rifle ready. Van Asvelt's boats were aiming for a point about half-way between the *Emma P.* and the shore. The odds were obviously four to one against our boat's crew. As to the distances, they were about even. But our men were evidently the better oarsmen. By the time our boat had traversed about one-half the distance, Van Asvelt's men opened fire. Almost simultaneously four rifles cracked in both enemy boats, but the shots all fell short or went wild—there were none of the modern high power rifles in use in those days—so Mr. Kennedy only held his rifle ready. He reserved his fire for closer range.

At last Van Asvelt was ready to play his hand.

As the distance gradually decreased, Van Asvelt's men began to fire at will, and Mr. Kennedy started to return their fire, while his oarsmen broke all records. Every moment I expected to see either Mr. Kennedy or one of his men hit as the bullets were splashing perilously near the boat. A good thing he was a crack shot—he was firing alone against eight of the others.

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Suddenly one of Van Asvelt's men dropped his rifle and slowly sank down in the boat. Seven more shots from Van's boats, then one of Mr. Kennedy's oarsmen lost his oar and sank down.

But he was immediately revenged. Another of Van Asvelt's men dropped as a shot rang out on board of the *Emma P.* In their haste they had approached the ship too closely.

I felt sure then that that must have been Bunk's shot. They began to retreat as fast as they could row. Two more shots went after them from the ship but fell short. Then I saw Mr. Kennedy draw his boat up alongside the *Emma P.*

It looked to me now as if Van Asvelt's boats were coming in shore. As fast as I could I ran toward the bushes to distribute the rifles, and arrived there just in time to see the limp form of one of the beach-combers carried off by two native women. The man had been too slow to respond when the rifles were thrust into the white men's hands by the over-zealous warriors, and he had been speared without ceremony.

"Shootum! Shootum!"

The others were being urged with those merciless spear-points touching their backs, and as the bullets of the first volley were wildly scattering over the bay, Van Asvelt's boats hastily beat a second retreat—this time toward the *Tinacula*. Van and his men were surprised by the rifle shots where they had expected only arrows and spears. I had a hard time making the excited natives understand that by now they were only wasting ammunition, as the boats were out of range.

The first battle of this guerilla warfare had been fought with the enemy retreating, and the natives in possession of one "long pig."

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That night there was a feast. Not a victory feast on the High Place—the war was not yet over—but the “long pig” had to be eaten then and there—meat spoils so quickly in the torrid zone. So the women were preparing the body of the beach-comber right there in the bush, in plain sight of his comrades. Those terror-stricken wretches saw the natives hastily dig a pit near the beach and start the fire long before sunset. They saw the stones being heated in the pit, the body of their comrade wrapped in banana leaves and placed among the hot stones. They saw the fire finally built on top of the stone heap. But if any of them entertained the idea of running, they must have been so overcome with fear that their legs refused to function. They could only sit there staring at the gruesome spectacle as if rooted to the ground.

Meanwhile I unconcernedly broiled a captured cocoanut crab on the fire for my own dinner.

CHAPTER XIV

I BECOME A SAVAGE *PRO TEM*

THE "long pig" was ready about half an hour after sunset and the feast was held by torchlight. No *kava* was brewed—the demijohn of rum took its place. This was just an informal affair, with no ceremonies. It differed from the feast on the High Place quite as much as a man-about-town's "just getting something to eat" differs from his dining.

As I had gone without sleep the night before, I felt pretty tired, but did not dare to close my eyes. Constant and anxious wondering as to who could have been the man who was shot in our boat, and whether he was killed, kept me awake. It also worried me to see that the natives were not as vigilant as the night before. None of them kept watch standing. They were either squatting on the ground or reposing in some other way, with our rifles as well as their own weapons under their necks, and I blamed the rum.

Thus I fought sleep, and sleep fought me until long after midnight, and then—sleep won out.

Suddenly I felt myself roughly shaken awake, a babel of voices, like the chattering of frightened monkeys, came to my ears, and I jumped up, marvelling at being alive.

Everything was in confusion. The pit, around which we had been camping, was still smoldering in the fast-fading darkness, and sending small curls of bluish smoke skyward. Excited savages were running around aim-

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lessly, the bones of their victim scattered about the beach. The head—a white man's head which was to be kept in mummified preservation in the *kamal* of the priests—was sticking on a drunkenly slanting spear at the head of the pit, its glassy eyes seeming to stare resentfully at this outrageous ending of its obsequies. The rifles and cartridge pouches were lying on the moist earth wherever the wakened blacks had dropped them, but there was not a single one of the prisoners in sight.

Suddenly Ugu and Plug-hat came running toward me.

"No gottum tambo fella!" they shouted, swinging their arms like mad.

Other natives were pointing toward the bay, where two of the canoes were drifting about in the early morning light. Then the whole thing was clear to me.

Those yellow mongrels had silently sneaked away while the rum had us savages down. Sneaked away, too cowardly even to avenge their comrade. They had boarded the *Tinacula* by launching the two dugouts.

The natives were almost wild enough to eat the two innocent canoes, but I managed to calm them down after a while by thrusting the rifles into their hands, shouting:

"Shootum along black fella."

This seemed to please them immensely, and they proved even more eager pupils than the day before, when I resumed my instructions in loading and firing the breech-loaders. None of them would have qualified as marksmen, to be sure, but I hoped that out of those sixteen rifles an occasional stray bullet might find its mark, and obviously Van Asvelt had not gained much by being reinforced with the fifteen beach-combers.

Very often, the circumstance which on the spur of the moment we are inclined to regard as hardship or disaster, may develop quite otherwise. It may awaken our dormant

faculties to cope with desperate situations. We are compelled to think. It was the necessity of having to deal with overwhelming odds which first induced primitive man to use his brain. Placed thus in the position of primitive man, I started to think in earnest.

As time went by, our predicament grew more and more sharply apparent to me.

There were those on board of the *Emma P.* who had no inkling of the added strength Van Asvelt had gained, and their underestimation of his strength might prove disastrous during the unavoidable, impending action. Then again, if I let this occurrence go by without getting some sort of warning to Captain McPurden, there was the possibility of my being suspected of having been won over by Van Asvelt, and that was the very last thing I cared to contemplate.

It was quite plain to me that Van now felt that he had the upper hand, and that he would not waste much time in waiting. He would soon try to strike the decisive blow, but probably not today, as he would wish to give his new forces a chance to recuperate so as to make them more efficient. He would surely attack the *Emma P.* first, to rid himself of that menace and to obtain possession of our wealth in pearls. The attack, I felt sure, would take place at night. He knew that those on board of the bark were good shots and would be protected against his bullets by the thick bulwark.

With the intention of at least sending a word of warning to the bark, I went into consultation with Ugu and Plughat, and after a good half-hour's effort I managed to make them understand what was on my mind. Whether or not Ugu understood that it was my first concern to send warning to the bark, was not clear to me, but he did seem to grasp my anticipation of the night attack. The lust

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for action and battle could be read in his flashing eyes.

"Gua fella catchum!" he shouted, seemingly delighted that something at last was going to happen.

I felt relieved. The monotony of this endless waiting was beginning to wear on my nerves. Possibly, after all, it was for the best that we were rid of the incumbrance of those yellow cutthroats, and thus were forced to take the initiative.

Ugu called out some orders to his men, and four of them, like gliding shadows, disappeared up a narrow, almost imperceptible, trail in the thicket which the women had used when bringing food to us. Meantime the rest calmly sat about, waiting, chattering and fondling the rifles.

Apparently Ugu was too good a general to stake victory upon those noisy weapons of the white man. His warriors were not yet educated up to them. What need? In the dark of night a keen-eyed savage could come close enough to send a spear or noiseless arrow home with deadly results. This must have been the subject they were discussing among themselves. The warriors carefully laid away their rifles and cartridge pockets and covered them with banana leaves and branches.

"Tambo devil club?" I asked, very much interested.

Ugu nodded his head, and pointing at the spears and arrows which his warriors were edging-up with stones, he grinned and said:

"No tambo along fella Gua!"

His suggestive gesture toward the setting sun, conveyed his plan to me.

That night came dark and dreary—the proper night for a raid by lynx-eyed savages. There was no moon, and besides, there were clouds in the sky. It was as black as only a tropical night can be, and the warriors were fairly

chuckling to themselves, as we emerged out of the bush and waited on the beach among the canoes.

They evidently anticipated a feast upon the white man's charmed flesh, and thought that those braves who might fall would be better off than working out their lives in some Australian mine.

Now and then a faint grating noise upon the coral beach sand could be heard above the soft murmur of the breaking swell. That was the only intimation that the beach was gradually becoming alive with canoes and armed men.

Where they came from was a mystery. They arrived, fully twoscore of canoes, each one containing from four to six men, armed to the teeth with their own ugly weapons that seemed to be parts of them.

It was so dark that I could not see a man more than three feet away, but those sons of nature found their way about as if it was broad daylight. They must have had the eyes of tigers—I could see them shining in the darkness.

Plug-hat no longer looked the wise wizard; he also was transformed into a fierce warrior. In addition to his spear and bow he carried a bamboo cylinder, about four inches thick in diameter and a foot long, suspended by a cord around his waist. This implement puzzled me, but I was soon to find out its purpose.

Now came about two hours of silent anxious waiting. All along the beach there seemed to be a ghostly, unhealthy atmosphere—it sent spasms of cold chills racing up and down my spine.

It was not fear that had seized me; no, it was something else. It was—it was—— No use trying; I could not grasp it.

Here I was, the only white man, a mere boy, among fully two hundred of the fiercest of savages, all of them just

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bristling with arms, and I was going into battle with them. Into battle, shoulder to shoulder, with man-eaters—and they, my comrades against my own race, lusting for the white man's blood.

That queer feeling; it was getting stronger in me—not fear, no, no—— I had the answer. It was lust for blood—the bonds of civilization were slipping from me—— I, too, was a savage.

The natives were all peering into the intense darkness—toward the *Tinacula*. That much I would make out from my position on the beach, but how their eyes could pierce the black night for such a distance and detect any movement on board of the brigantine was beyond me. It was that primitive sense, which science cannot explain, that guided them.

Suddenly Ugu, the giant warrior and Plug-hat sprang on the alert—like jungle beasts who scent trouble long before it appears. Those three were the only ones close enough to me to be seen, but I could instantly feel that all the rest of them had also scented something. Then I became dully conscious that that same primitive instinct was beginning, as it were, to burrow into my own nervous system. Strange to say, I, too, felt that there was activity on board the *Tinacula*, and the almost imperceptible raps which Plug-hat gave on his bamboo cylinder would have been audible to me then for more than a hundred yards.

Immediately all the canoes, with our whole company in them, slid off the beach—silently like so many eels. They glided through the water without any perceptible motion from the many paddles. Those paddles did not create a trace of phosphorescent disturbance.

The long line of canoes slid toward a point well astern of the *Emma P.* and a considerable distance past her—my primitive sense now told me that, although the ship her-

self was invisible in the dark. We were traveling in a wide curve; I could feel the continuous change of direction; and again I felt it when all the canoes gradually came to rest.

A queer, free feeling suffused itself through me. What was it? I tried to think, but that savage nature that had seized my soul would not let me. I could now only sense things by instinct. But then, when after the banished suspense my voluntary thoughts returned, I got the answer to that question. It was magnetism! Mental telepathy! My close association with those savages during the last couple of days had awakened that dormant force, so that I, too, was like a beast.

Instinctively, I knew not why, I reached out my hand. It met the giant's. He thrust something a bit sticky into it—a bow and three arrows. The touch of these weapons made me feel more than ever that now I also was a savage with the lust for blood surging through my brain.

If, in that frame of mind, I had been at the feast on the High Place, I, too, would have eaten and relished the "long pig." How easily the thin film of civilization that covers us can be destroyed!

We waited. Among us, around us, there was deathly silence. Only an occasional, noiseless, invisible stroke of a paddle kept us from drifting out of position with the tide. I could sense it to the inch whenever we drifted a foot or two, and again when we regained our position. He who has never been a savage cannot understand what wonderful faculties nature has given us which we are killing with our civilization. I hated the white man who made war against those blacks—my comrades—and I was thirsting for his blood.

Suddenly I was aware of the approach of something. I sensed it.

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There they are—those slavers! my instinct told me, even before I became faintly conscious of the light tapping upon Plug-hat's bamboo drum. I felt the canoes creep, stealthily, ahead—toward five rowboats. I knew it although there was no splashing of oars audible nor any phosphorescence visible. The canoes again came to rest as I *felt* that light tap. They formed a long line parallel with the course of the rowboats. I *knew* it—and instantly I knew every bow was bent, every barbed arrow aimed at the boats—but only for an instant.

Silence! Then a light tap, and, with a twanging of bowstrings and whirring of arrows, disaster fell upon those white devils, whose howls of pain and surprise, intermingled with curses, were ringing through the still night air, as a second volley of arrows sped with still deadlier accuracy in their direction. Then, almost simultaneously with our second volley, came three tongues of flame and three rifle reports exactly from the direction where I *knew* the *Emma P.* was located. They, on board of the bark, had been on the alert, but we savages showed them their target.

A wild, panicky splashing of oars, making a bright visible phosphorescent disturbance, now brought the boats into clear view and made them an easy target for the riflemen on board of the bark, who kept up an incessant fire. Then—but it sounded foreign to me—I heard Captain McPurden's great voice ring out:

"Stop shooting! You'll hit the niggers—they're after them!"

The boats were in full retreat. Only two shots were fired by those who manned them, and these shots went wild. Many of the men must have been severely wounded or killed, for they took no time to shoot at marks which they could not see. They needed every available man at

the oars; while we started to give chase to cut off their retreat toward the *Tinacula*.

We cut off all but one boat which managed to slip by, for when they were finally driven on to the beach, there were only four, although I knew there had been five. The survivors—fifteen in all—four of them slightly wounded—surrendered without a struggle. In their panic they had lost sight of the fact that surrender would only doom them to a worse fate, and that it would have been better for them to die fighting. They did not have the courage to admit to themselves that they were afraid to die.

It was a victory worthy of celebration. Savage instinct had triumphed over the cunning and scheming of civilized man. The demon gods, who had favored the victorious blacks—spared every one of them against those deadly devil clubs that could kill at a distance—had to be praised and amused. That, the gods demanded, lest they withhold their favours on some future occasion. There was no time now to rest. A weird dance around fires, the glow of which would bring to their sight the ghastly spoils, which, according to the priests, would demonstrate the required homage.

Fire ploughs sprang into action; candlenut torches and fires were lit, and nearly two hundred black savages, with one white savage among them, held a devil-devil dance around fifteen white, horrified prisoners and sixteen dead or mortally wounded “long pigs.”

But that was not all. There was to be a ritual. The horror of it even makes me shudder today. A new warrior was to be initiated, and that warrior was I. That was the demand of the priests of the demons, and that demand had to be obeyed.

Savage that I was, it nevertheless was horrible.

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The weird dance came to an abrupt halt. Three glistening, painted bodies seemed almost to emerge from the fire. I stood spellbound.

There before my eyes they slit open the body of one of the wounded victims, and tore out his heart and liver. His low, dying moan is still ringing in my ears.

With those dripping organs in their besodden hands they advanced toward me. I would have run, but I was rooted to the spot. Then I felt my body sway, almost in a faint, as they were smearing the hot, reeking blood over my arms and chest, while all the blacks danced by, each one in turn sinking his teeth into those gruesome objects.

Thus I was pronounced a warrior of their tribe, for I had fought to kill, with their own weapons, against my own race.

The weird dance stopped at dawn, and then I saw that the wounded had died in the meantime. Three of the dead were Chinese—some of Van Asvelt's stink pot experts. I tried to avoid looking at the fifteen prisoners, but I had recognized eleven of them—through a mere fleeting glance. They were some of our deserters, who soon would pay the penalty for their treachery. Nothing could save them now.

Then, in the early morning light, a small group of men heaved anchor on board of the *Tinacula*—a group so diminished in numbers that it would not have been worth the lives it would have taken to capture them. The wires on the brigantine had saved them. I now fully realized the value of those wire tangles. On that dark night we savages could have captured a cruiser before the crew could have had time to think of their guns.

At last—I had almost thought they had abandoned me as a savage—a boat was being manned alongside of the *Emma P.* My heart beat fast when I saw half of the

crew, including Captain McPurden, Mr. Kennedy and Cathryn, land on the beach.

It was good to see them again, but I did not want them to see the gruesome telltale on my body, which filled me with disgust; so I hastened into the breakers to give the clean water a chance to do what my hands were not permitted to do lest I bring the wrath of the demons upon my head.

I was glad to see them all in such good spirits.

"By the Lord, Harry, your skin is turning black," the Captain greeted me jovially. "Do you savvy de English?"

I did my best to appear light hearted; they should never know.

"Hello, white folks!" I replied, pointing at the dead and live "long pigs" who were now being carried toward the path which they would only travel once. "There's a bunch whose skin will soon turn some other colour."

"They brought it on themselves," said the Captain, shrugging his shoulders; "I can't interfere."

"Are they all dead?" Cathryn asked.

"No; fifteen out of the thirty-one there are alive," I answered, feeling dejected again.

She gasped with horror.

"Oh, please, Captain," she pleaded, "won't you ask the chief to spare the live ones, at least, until after we are gone?"

"I'll do my best to please you," the Captain replied, "but if I was one of those fellows, I'd rather have it over with the quickest way. Lord, but what cowards those fellows must be that they didn't fight till the breath left them!"

I wanted to rid my mind of all this horror.

"Who was shot in our boat the other day?" I asked. Unpleasant as it was to put that question, it was, at least, some diversion.

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"It was poor Mike," Cathryn replied sadly, "and he won't last much longer, although we're doing all we can for him."

More sorrow! Mike Donovan, a fellow I had liked particularly well. Mike, the life of the ship—who could always be cheerful.

We now went into consultation with Ugu, Plug-hat and some of the warriors, and it was agreed upon that they should keep the captured boats, guns and other weapons found in them, and that, in return therefor, the prisoners would be spared until after our departure. Then, after recovering our own rifles from the bush, I returned to the ship with the others, to be once more half civilized.

When I arrived on board, the ship seemed strange to me. For two days and three nights I had been alone with the savages, and now I could feel the touch of civilization upon passing the gangway.

Cathryn took me into the cabin to see Mike, whom she had tried to comfort as much as possible. There was no question but that Mike would not survive. He had been shot through the stomach, and with our limited and crude means for medical or surgical aid it was only a matter of a day, or possibly hours, and he knew it.

"Well, Mike," I said cheerfully, upon entering, "I suppose you've heard about our glorious victory, and that Van Asvelt has cleared out, with most of his gang gone to the stew-pit?"

"Yes, boy," he said in a weak voice; "it's sad. This little girl has told me all about it, and I'm glad she didn't fall into his claws. Take my advice, all of ye, an' quit workin' the Islands; no good comes to the men who go hunting the pearls; they all go the same way I'm goin' now."

"No, no, Mike," Cathryn broke in; "you're not going to

die; you'll be all right again before we leave Guadalupe.

"That's nice of you to try to cheer me, little lassie," he said weakly, "but I've seen many men go the same way, an' I'm glad that I'll get a Christian burial."

He lay still for a time, breathing feebly, and the girl gave me a comprehending look. Then reaching for her hand, Mike looked at her and spoke:

"Lassie, you remind me so much of my little girl of years ago. It's for her that I came to the Islands, an' it's a favour I'll be asking of ye, if ye don't mind."

"Why, of course, Mike," she said, her eyes lighting up; "anything you want me to do. Tell me all you care to tell."

"I guess I'd better go on deck for a while," I said, but Mike shook his head.

"No, boy; I want ye to hear what I'm saying; it won't do ye no harm to listen 'cause you're young."

"Tell me what you wanted to say, Mike," the girl urged him gently, "before it's——" She caught herself, but Mike had understood the meaning of her words. With a smile playing about his lips he said:

"There, lassie; I knew you felt it but you were too good at heart to tell me."

He relapsed into silence again, while we waited anxiously. We could see that he would not last much longer. Suddenly he rallied his strength, and spoke in a clear voice:

"'Twas seventeen years ago, lassie, and I was a youngster of twenty-four, sailin' before the mast—sailin' out o' Liverpool most of the time, an' it happened that I was outward bound for Australia. There were a few passengers on board the ship, going out to try for a fortune in a new land—bless 'em, but they didn't know what they

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were up against! * There was a man an' his wife an' daughter amongst 'em, an' the daughter—Nora was her name—was a lass 'bout like you. She an' I become good friends, an' nights she'd come down the main deck an' we'd be talkin', and the Old Man didn't mind it a bit—'as long as it don't interfere with your duty it's all right.' he used to say.

"Well, we got to be such friends that we were planning to get married, and o' course, like all sailors, I never had much money, an' so we'd have to wait a bit. When we come to Sydney I'd go in shore evenin's an' meet her, and so it came that I met a fellow who'd been pearlin' an' he had money to throw away. I told Nora about that, an' she says, 'Mike, why don't you go pearlin,' then you'll get enough to get married on in a trip.'

"Well, I says, 'Nora, the skipper won't pay me off here 'cause men are hard to get,' and she says, 'Run away from your ship; what little money is comin' to ye you'd soon get back pearling.'

"So I thought I'd try it for a trip, an' jumped ship, an' the next day I was bound for the Islands.

"Well, I come back to Sydney, after a six months' trip, an' had struck it rich. I had more'n a hundred an' eighty pounds comin' to me and we'd start a plannin'—but I thought, 'a little more won't hurt'—so I went away for another trip on a schooner an' was gone about three months, with about sixty pounds comin'; but when I went to Nora's house she wasn't there any more, an' I couldn't find out anything about her or her folks."

He stopped speaking, and by the contortions of his face we could see that he was in severe pain. It was plain that he was failing; but when I was about to rush on deck to

* It should be remembered that then, in the year '57, sailing vessels bound for Australia around the Cape of Good Hope, were still carrying passengers.

inform the Captain, he raised his hand in protest and resumed. His voice had grown weaker and he spoke hurriedly now as if he was afraid that he would not be able to finish before the end came.

"Yes, lassie"—his words came fast—"she was gone, an' I had two hundred an' forty pounds! an' to drown my sorrow I started to blow in the money—drinkin' and gamblin'—but most o' it I lost.

"Then, almost seven years later I met her mother on the street in Melbourne, an' she told me that Nora had run off with a soldier who'd come back from Africa. He was a sergeant, an' she got stuck on his uniform—he'd been in some kind o' war an' had his medals, too. It'd killed her father, 'cause the fellow wasn't no good. She told me that they'd got married all right but that he'd finally left her an' put her in all kinds of trouble——"

Mike stopped short. He was writhing in pain. Again I voiced my intention of calling the Captain and this time he nodded assent—but Cathryn held up her hand:

"Just a moment!" Then bending over Mike she queried: "What about the favour you wanted me to do for you? Have you ever seen Nora again? Do you know where she is now?"

Her feminine intuition evidently told her that the favour had something to do with Nora.

Mike nodded and his words came hurriedly:

"Saw her—six years ago—in a tingle-tangle in Sydney—now she's in jail there—comin' out in a year. My share of the trip—give it to Nora. Tell her Mike says, 'Go straight now.' The money'll help her."

He was still, and I rushed on deck to call the Captain and the crew.

When we came in—bareheaded—Cathryn was bending over Mike. She had clutched both his hands and held a

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crude wooden cross between them. Her tears were dropping on his chest. Mike was smiling as we heard him whisper:

"Nora! Nora! so you've come back to me? An' I'll give up the Islands!"

His chest heaved in a deep sigh and he lay motionless. Cathryn buried her face in her hands and sobbed as we went on deck. There the Captain took out his knife, and making a notch in the companionway-slide, said:

"Another curse on the pearls! One of that girl's tears is worth more'n all the pearls on board!"

CHAPTER XV

“HERE LIES MICHAEL DONOVAN”

THAT night there was a great feast on the High Place, with more tom-tom beating than at any previous evening, but none of us seemed to hear or see it. We were preparing to give Mike a Christian funeral as he had wished. The little wooden cross, which Cathryn had made when she saw what was to be his fate, never left his hands again.

We buried Mike on the following day. Right near the High Place. Probably the only man who has ever been buried at such a spot. The native warriors stood around in awed silence as his body was lowered into its deep grave and the solemn services were held in our crude way. They simply could not understand white men.

Cathryn had arranged and managed the whole thing. On a teakwood plank, which was to be used for a head-piece, she had artistically lettered—with red lead—the epitaph:

HERE LIES MICHAEL DONOVAN,
SEAMAN—BARK—EMMA P.
Killed Through a White Man's Treachery.
And a Curse Upon the Pearls.
Nov. 12, 1874.

The natives were so impressed by the ceremony that they built a small bamboo temple over the grave, and the

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devil-devil doctors declared it "tambo." And no one could touch Mike's grave after that.

* * * * *

After Mike's funeral, peace came again over this troubled shore. The diving crews began work again, and the stock of our trade goods was gradually diminishing, while our hold was filling with undreamt-of wealth.

Daily Mr. Guerny sweated over his books, keeping tally of what went out and what came in, while the nauseating odour of rotting pearl oysters filled the air.

Cathryn often went to the shoals with me, but she had changed. Although she seemed to enjoy diving and swimming as before, she was not the happy, carefree girl that she had been. At times she would sit in the boat, watching the divers with unseeing eyes, or stroll up and down on the quarter-deck all alone until late into the night.

Whenever I asked her as to the cause of her worrying she only shook her head and replied: "Oh, I'm just thinking about Nora," and lapsed into silence again.

"Did you get Nora's full name before Mike died?" I once asked her when she was thus pacing the deck.

"Yes," she said, "I have all the particulars and I will see her as soon as we get back to Sydney. Do you think Mike had something worth while coming to him?"

"Yes," I replied, "Mr. Guerny said that it would be more than she deserved."

"I wish he would not talk that way," she flashed erratically. "It was not Nora's fault." With these words she left me, to be alone again with her thoughts.

Thus nearly five weeks passed after the last tragedy without further events outside of our daily toil. Then one morning at breakfast Captain McPurden announced that our mission here would end with the day. Never before

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had he made a trip with only a single stop, and, considering the short time spent, this had been the richest trip he had ever known.

Our tangles had already been dismantled as we did not need them. The natives on frequent occasions had proved their friendliness and we had spent many nights in their villages back of the shore.

We were now preparing for our departure. Sails were bent, running gear overhauled and hatches battened down—everything shipshape and ready for our sea trip.

The natives were sorry to see us leave, but we told them that we would be back again in a few months, and they again avowed their everlasting friendship toward us—we had been the only whites who had dealt with them without a clash, and we attributed our good fortune to the presence of our ship's angel. In spite of their savage nature they had remained true to their promise to spare the prisoners until after our departure, but all offers for securing the release of those unfortunates were sternly refused. Too many slavers had gone unpunished, and the devil-devil doctors had said that the charm of their flesh would now make them immune against any others who should choose to come their way.

Our Malaitans, however, were given the liberty to settle among them, as the natives seemed to carry no lasting grudge against former foes who came just as plain warriors, but they did entertain undying hatred for white men who carried them off to helpless bondage.

The night before we sailed, the natives invited us to a great feast—not on the High Place, for that was sacred ground—"tambo" for anything except feasting on their enemies. This feast was held right on the beach, and it much resembled the ordinary Rhode Island clambake.

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Cocoanut crabs and rats *—the most hated pests of the Islands on account of their destructiveness to the cocoanuts—were broiled by the hundreds, and again we were rocked to sleep in the cradle of the vile *kava*.

Of course, the result, as might have been expected, was that we did not heave anchor on the following day until late in the afternoon, and that evening, when we rounded the treacherous Taunu Shoals, the last we saw of Guadalcanar was a reddish glow upon the bluff—like a house on fire.

Then we all were sure that Cathryn's were the only tears caused by that fire, for those who met their fate had been given up as lost—long ago—by those dear to them.

* * * * *

We reached Sydney less than two weeks later. Fair breezes and only a few minor squalls gave the *Emma P.* a chance to make an average of nearly seven knots an hour. The crew were in good spirits, but Cathryn continued to brood over that certain something that troubled her mind.

Many a night, during my watch on deck, she used to pace the poop with me for more than an hour at a time without speaking a word, and then disappear down the companionway with a curt "I guess I'll turn in now! Good night!" No one could find out what worried her though she treated everybody just as friendly as before.

When we dropped anchor in the bay, buyers fairly swarmed on board. We had returned in about half the time they had expected. Therefore they felt certain that we had had a very successful trip, and they all competed for purchases.

* The rats here referred to are not of the same species as the common house rat. They are much larger and almost black. Their flesh is fully as palatable as a rabbit's.

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"Boys," Mr. Guernsey addressed us after his first encounter with them, "your shares will reach the sky; the buyers are almost fighting to outbid one another."

"I am glad for Nora's sake," Cathryn told me, much relieved.

That same day she sent a message to her aunt in Rockhampton, who must have thought the girl was lost. She also sent a message to the branch of the Bank of England in Sydney to arrange for credit, and the same day we took almost half a boatload of packages on board for her.

The following morning, about an hour after coming on deck, while everybody else was enjoying a good, long rest, I almost fell over when I saw the young lady emerge from the companionway. The transformation simply left me speechless and I almost tore my scalp off in removing my cap.

It would take an artist—and an expert on feminine charms and attire at that—to describe her, so magnificent she looked in her new midsummer creations.

"Good-morning, Mr. Second Mate!" She smiled at me. "Oh, but I wish that all women could enjoy the sensation of being a woman again the way I do this morning."

"Well," I said, "and that means that the *Emma P.* will lose her Guardian Angel, and we won't see you any more."

"Of course it doesn't mean that!" she reproved me. "If the Captain will let me, I would like to make another trip. I really enjoy this better than yachting; but today I am going to ask him to let me go in shore, because I want to see Nora."

I felt as if a weight had been lifted from me.

"The skipper will be only too delighted to have you with us next trip," I said. "Don't you remember him saying that you brought us good luck?"

She did not reply but instead again looked troubled,

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and again my curiosity as to her strange attitude was aroused.

"Cathryn," I finally pleaded, "won't you please tell me what has worried you so much lately? If it's a secret, don't be afraid. I won't tell anybody. I hope you feel that you can trust me."

For a while she stood undecided, studying her slippered toes. Then she looked around to make sure that no one else was within hearing distance, and a serious expression came over her face.

"I'll tell you this, if you give me your word of honour not to repeat it as long as I live," she said, looking straight into my eyes. "That Sergeant who ruined Nora and Mike's lives was my cousin. . . . I was only a little girl when he married her, but I remember it. . . . He is dead now, but he left her long before he died."

"Poor Nora! I am going to right my cousin's wrongs, if it isn't too late, and make the pearls dry up some of the tears they have caused."

I have kept my word to her. This is the first time the story has ever been told.

* * * * *

For fully an hour we stood side by side at the taffrail watching the ebbing tide spin gentle ripples over the low preventers of our mizzen chain-plates.

Neither of us spoke a word, but still we felt that we were carrying on a conversation. The kind of conversation which can be held between two active minds, when there is much more said than words can express.

We had returned from a voyage, had lived through and shared adventures which but few were granted the fortune to endure. Here we were back among civilized men. Back with a burden of untold wealth—wealth here where

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man had fixed an arbitrary value on it—useless junk in the distant sea where men had fought and died for it.

Those playful tide ripples about the chain-plates—not much to occupy one's time or thought, but they seemed to insist upon reminding us of our low freeboard. The low freeboard told but one story—it spoke only of our weighty cargo—of useless wealth. . . . What was all this cargo in the ship's hold compared to this ancient hulk itself? This hulk of wood and metal, once so skilfully produced? And yet today, in this age of commercial greed, its usefulness being considered over, it would be humiliated into service as a tow barge or abandoned to rot on the banks of some stagnant river.

To us, out there among the Islands, the ship had been all. To the men of the world, there in civilization, the cargo was all, but my heart was with the ship.

Many times in later years, when relaxing upon the moon-lit quarterdeck of my *Glenora*, I related the story of my first trading voyage on board of the old *Emma P.* and of Captain McPurden, the Grand Old Man of the Old South Seas.

It was a glorious morning as we stood there watching the still waters slip by. The whole world seemed at peace. There were other ships anchored in the bay, but the bay slept in peace. There was nothing to remind one of the trials and tribulations we had gone through to bring these useless riches to civilization.

But my heart was not at peace. Soon, in a few hours, there would be lighters alongside. The pearl shell, the sandal-wood, the ebony which we carried would go to distant buzzing factories to be made into useless ornaments. The pearls in our strong-box would go to distant unknown jewelers. They would be polished, mounted, proudly displayed by vain women. Would those women think of the

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men who had died for those pearls? Would they be able to visualize those gruesome spectacles which this little slip of a girl by my side had witnessed? How many of those women, how many of their male admirers would be able and willing to endure the hardships that this little creature by my side had braved?

A modern athletic woman—would she?

No! I say. A thousand times no. There is a vast difference between enduring real unadulterated hardships and performing to an applauding audience.

Nor would a modern athletic man. I know, for I have seen them wilt when away from the limelight. Away from even all hope of communication or aid—that was where the men I knew had to prove their worth to themselves. Hunger, thirst, all privations had to be endured not in play or as a diversion, but in bitter earnest. It was the survival of the fittest . . . Out there where the gnarled unsightly wind-beaten weed could prove its superiority over the fine, carefully raised specimen of man's training.

I should have felt happy on that morning, but no, my heart was heavy. This was the end of my first trip as a trader. What would come next? I was determined to stick to the ship. Make the next trip—any number of trips—anywhere, good or bad.

There was a warm spot in my heart for this old hull; there were other warm spots there for her skipper, her crew, this marvelous little woman, but was not this, the end of the trip, liable to be the parting?

* * * * *

There were to be many hilarious nights in shore before we sailed again. Pitfalls of civilization were awaiting some of us. Who could tell but that some of us might not be lured away? Never to meet again? Had I not been

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unwittingly lured away from the *Dolphin* months before? Here was a cross-road where friends might have to part. There was no telling what Fate had in store for us, and my soul was not yet sufficiently calloused not to care. Oh, how gladly I would have then given my share of our wealth for just one glance into the future!

I could not feel happy. I could not think of the good times we would have in shore. I was wishing we could have stayed among the Islands forever—had never returned to civilization.

I almost envied Mike—"poor Mike," Cathryn had said—Mike who slept peacefully in Guadalcanar far away from damnable civilization, never to see its curses again.

What a strange stroke of Fate had brought Cathryn on board! A frail little woman among the roughest of men. Men who looked up to her as a goddess.

Yes, she was real, many years ago, unconscious of her own little greatness, ready to perform feats—just for the love of them—which would have put to shame many of her modern sisters of record.

She is gone now. Gone is the glorious *Emma P.* Gone is the Grand Old Man of the South Seas who played the trading game for the love of adventure, and so is Van Asvelt who played the game for gain. Gone is Dundee Mike. He went paying the penalty for his crime.

I said that I would have given my share of the cargo for but one glance into the future, but on that morning I did seem to have a glimpse of the days that were yet to come. Just one vague but blurred glance ahead.

I had never seen that scoundrel Dundee then, but I had visions of him on that morning—my thoughts made me visualize him—and there was also a vision of a flashing blade—in my own hand.

My mind was traveling fast. The future, the future—

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that seemed to be the only thing that interested me. The past now appeared to lie too far behind.

The future and Dundee Mike—those two seemed to belong together. The thought of the one brought on the other.

Now the girl came to my mind again. Was she ever thinking of her schooner any more? Or was her mind only occupied with Nora? Did she really mean what she had said about wishing to make the next trip? Would she still feel that way after a taste of life in shore?

It seemed all so strange, so preposterous.

Would Captain McPurden let her . . . ? Of course he would. I knew he would let her go along. . . .

There was Dundee Mike again. I had to speak or burst with suppressed curiosity.

"Cathryn," I suddenly awakened her out of her day dreams, "what are you going to do about the *Iorano*? Are you going to let that Dundee fellow go clear, or are you going to make a report of it?"

The abruptness of the question seemed to startle her.

"Why," she gasped with a look of surprise that almost bordered on annoyance, "what on earth made you think of that, now?"

She turned her eyes away from me and studied the water again as if in a dream. I felt guilty. Had I blundered?—irritated an old wound? I knew she was of the type who could love a ship—an inanimate structure with a soul—just as I could. Like Captain McPurden.

Four bells tolled on some distant ship. Then on another, followed by a regular peal of bells. High musical notes from the binnacles aft intermingled with low warning pongs from the fo'c'sle heads like the clap of doom.

Six o'clock. Sydney harbour came to life, but the *Emma P.* slept on. The crew was weary from the tedious

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trip; there was no strict discipline on a trader. They all took advantage of the opportunity to rest, all but two—two whose young hearts full of romance could find their rest in dreams of adventure.

The girl seemed not to have heard the bells. Her eyes remained upon the water when she spoke. She seemed to be dreaming again.

"The *Iorano*." She spoke the name not much above a whisper, almost with reverence. "I wonder where she is now? Do you think it would be possible ever to find her?"

"That," I said, undecided whether to be optimistic but trying to appear worldly-wise, "is a hard question to answer. The South Pacific is large. There are many places the law never reaches. I have noticed how readily the customs officials can be bribed, and the men higher up are no less human than they. There are but few cruisers and those few seem to be always busy with social receptions on board. I doubt whether they would bother about a vessel which they may look upon as an ordinary trading schooner."

She looked at me in surprise. Her eyes seemed to tell me that she saw in me not the boy whom she had been heretofore almost inclined to patronize. There was affection, comradeship in her look when she spoke.

"Yes," she conceded, "I quite agree with you. You seem to understand men." (I was glad she did not say "in spite of your tender years.")

"No," she continued after a little pause, "I don't think there will be much effort made to locate the *Iorano*. She is lost—we traders must fight our own battles . . . Some day this Dundee may get his just deserts. For the present I am thankful for the friends the episode has brought me."

Those last words of hers made me swell with pride and

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gratitude. "We traders," she had said. She considered herself one of us. What a stout heart to be in this fluffy little bundle of pink silk on this lawless hulk!

Could there have been a strain—just a remote strain—of the Maori or the Polynesian in that heart?

I knew what she meant by that remark. She would come back. The Islands were in her bones—as they were in mine.

"Well," I replied, rather elated, full of enthusiasm, "some day I hope to run across that scoundrel Dundee, and then——"

She shot me an appraising glance as she cut short my spoken resolution. It was that glance that humiliated me more than her words.

Then!—her words were like the stab of a spear—"remember that this Dundee Mike is very big and strong—while you——"

"Are only a boy, you mean?" I concluded for her, feeling somewhat hurt. "But don't forget that I will not always be a boy, I have already fought with men, and am filling a man's place now. The Islands will make a man out of me."

"You are a man now," she came right back, trying to avoid any misunderstanding. "I only meant to caution you . . . I'm sure you will see the day when this Dundee will be like a worm to you in spite of his size.

"The Islands. . . ." she continued, gazing dreamily at the distant clouds coloured with all the glory of an Australian morning, and as I looked at her in that light, with the mild breeze playing about her wavy tresses, I felt sure I saw the strain of those fierce warriors whom civilization may exterminate, but will never succeed in assimilating.

"The Islands." She repeated the word almost tenderly. "They make men—and they make beasts—out of you

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whites"—now I knew I had read her right—"but I'm sure you will be one of the exceptions—like Captain McPurden."

What a loyal heart! But no wonder, with the blood of——?

As if anxious to change the subject before the question already on my tongue could come, she branched off:

"Isn't Captain McPurden wonderful?" Taking it for granted that my reply would be in the affirmative, she added: "I don't believe he is such a beast after all when he is drinking. I think it mostly depends upon those whom he is dealing with."

The veil was beginning to lift from my eyes. I understood. She loved Old Mac. Kindled by the gratitude and loyalty of that native strain within her, her heart had developed an affection for the man who had rescued her, which I was yet too young to understand.

Suddenly it came to me how the skipper had changed since she had appeared among us. I, too, loved the Old Man. His happiness would also be mine, and for the first time that morning that depressed feeling left me. After all, this would not be the end. This girl—daughter of the Islands as she had admitted—would hold our little world together.

She did make the next trip, and again the next.

Her marvelous pluck and wonderful skill at anything that men could do had long ago won the admiration of the entire regular crew. Not once have I known a member of any of the various pick-up crews dare to insult her.

How I missed her during the three weeks of her absence while we were discharging our cargo and taking on our supply of trade goods! But it was not I alone who missed her. When she finally returned about a week before we were ready for sea, I knew why the hilarious nights in

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shore had been of so little interest to the skipper.

Whatever objections her aunt might have entertained against her new and rather unusual mode of living, she must have overcome without any difficulty. She had a will of her own which had a way of discouraging any interference with her plans.

There is not much room for romance during the dull commercial operation of discharging and taking on cargo in a civilized community. Whatever happens of interest to the sailor, generally happens during the evening in shore, but once in a while there come diversions on board, and they generally incline to the humorous.

That was exactly what happened then, and, of course, it had to be none other than Polly who unwittingly furnished the amusement.

Polly had to do something to earn his grub, and the least he could do was to give us an occasional laugh at his expense, although the cook had long since discovered that the reverse side of Polly's severely stretched trousers was an extremely handy depository for the wrath of his high-strung Spanish temper when bad weather conditions caused dishes to break, the fire to go out, or other culinary trials and tribulations demanded an outlet for superfluous energy.

Captain McPurden had decided that Polly was more of an incumbrance than his usefulness to the doctor warranted, but, Polly being young and foolish and inclined to be helpless, to say the least, the Captain had also decided that it would be a shame to turn him out into the cold, cruel world to become an easy victim to Sydney's waterfront parasites. Thus, spurred on by almost paternal emotions, he had notified the heartbroken parents in Melbourne of the whereabouts of their wayward son. More than a week had elapsed, but no overjoyed father

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appeared to claim his erring boy.

One evening, before we were ready to go in shore to sample the quality of various wet goods of numerous emporiums, Mr. Kennedy, Bunk, Cockney and I were loitering at the rail near the galley while the cook was explaining to Polly just why in his estimation he would never be a sailor. We happened to overhear part of the most important one's lecture to his dull assistant.

"You never no learn how to peel ze potat'."

Mr. Kennedy was always ready for a little jest.

"Yes, cook," he consoled the irate artisan; "if his father doesn't come and get him pretty soon, the skipper says we'll pickle him an' take him to Guadalcanar an' trade him off to that devil-doctor who's so fond o' bacon. Then we'll get something out of him anyway."

Mr. Kennedy's jokes always brought on merriment. His Celtic ways of saying things could produce a humorous effect on even more serious subjects than the mere pickling of a fat boy.

The joke, however, was not to end there. We were to have practical demonstration of the truth that when speaking of His Satanic Majesty he is bound to appear.

We were still doing due justice to Mr. Kennedy's piece of witticism, expressing our heartfelt sympathy for the victim, of course, when a steam launch wharfed at our accommodation ladder, and an extremely well-dressed, middle-aged gentleman, who had all the earmarks of more than comfortable wealth, came up the ladder in rather dignified state. The gentleman evidently was a good judge of men as to their relative importance. He walked right up to Mr. Kennedy as if he knew at once that before him stood the executive-in-chief of this renowned galleon.

"I am Mr. Hornsby," he curtly introduced himself to

the astonished mate. "I came to get my son—Aloysius Hornsby. He is on board here, I am informed through the courtesy of Captain McPurden."

The gentleman's manner, his bearing, in fact his entire appearance carried with it a certain personality which could not well be denied. The slovenly cook, standing in the galley doorway, gasped in speechless surprise. The five of us also gasped, equally taken aback. This was the first time that any of us had heard the name. So this, to us decidedly overdressed individual, was Polly's father. We were perfectly willing to accept his word for that confession. We could not do otherwise. Who else, in our estimation, would have any desire to claim the honour? None of us had ever bothered to find out whether the fat little rascal even had a father, or even a name, as far as that mattered. We only knew Polly and did not boast about that. Now we stood almost holding our breaths. What would come next? The events of this trip surely were not yet over. Things came to us in bunches.

We were not kept long in suspense.

While we, the five of us, dumbfounded salt-pickled roughnecks that we looked like—self-conscious of our lowliness—stared our surprise, and Mr. Hornsby, in his well-bred splendour—conscious of his superiority—stared his disgust at this piratical quintette, his beloved son's late tormentors, there was a noise like the clattering of a large, wooden bowl upon a cement-lined galley floor. That noise was accompanied by a staccato sound like the spattering of numerous peeled and unpeeled potatoes bouncing and rolling about aimlessly. There was the appearance of a rather undignified full-moon-shaped vision in the galley doorway followed by a decidedly greasy looking under-shirt and pants filled to bursting by what almost resembled a human form—the pants being prevented from remaining

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behind in the galley by a hand which in colour and shape rather resembled an over-ripe tomato. There was the sound of a juvenile overjoyed voice that almost shrieked:

"Papa!"

There was the sound of a clumsily shambling pair of feet on the hard deck planking. Then noises and movements subsided to give way to surprised and indignant, elated and humiliated stares as irate father and expiratically-inclined son stood confronting each other.

The scene brought tender expectations to the hearts and minds of five embarrassed and flabbergasted privateers. We expected to witness a most touching display of paternal and filial affection. We expected to see one pair of tweed-covered, well-tailored arms, and one pair of bare, greasy, fat arms, entwined in the most approved form of professional wrestlers. We expected to witness a demonstration of the most profound and unfeigned affection and joy at this return of the prodigal. . . .

But nay! Not so! We were to be disappointed. But a far greater—to us a far more pleasant—treat was in store for us.

Mr. Hornsby's look of surprise and disgust settled into a frown. He took one dignified step forward. Without a word of comment or greeting his fawn-coloured, gloved left hand entwined itself around the greasy neck-band of the sweat-soaked undershirt. His fine tweed-clad figure bent forward in a most dignified bow toward Mr. Kennedy. His immaculately gloved right hand removed a highly polished silk hat from his well-groomed head, and placed it rim up upon the deck.

"With your leave, sir," he addressed the much-perplexed officer of privateers.

The well-gloved right hand encircled the tar-stiffened end of the fore-upper-top-sail halyard. The carefully

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tailored left knee bent forward, shaping itself into a comfortable resting-place for Aloysius Hornsby's ample stomach, and, with his left foot firmly set upon the spare spar near the rail, Mr. Hornsby proceeded to prove that actions speak louder than words. The whole performance, in fact, spoke of action with the least possible waste of energy. Every little detail could have only been perfected through previous practice and long experience. There were no meaningless, time-wasting, standardized phrases such as, "Now, my son, this is going to hurt me more than you." Mr. Hornsby probably realized that we would have marked him down as a liar if he had thus expressed himself.

Polly evidently knew his place. His whole behaviour and lack of resistance proved that he had been there before. If he was taken at all by surprise, his expressionless face would have given no indication of it anyhow. The way he fitted himself into the rôle of the repentent transgressor surely proved considerable experience on his part also, despite his tender age.

But all previous actions had been only preparatorily leading up to the climax. Thus far the performance could have been accompanied solely by the snare drum if the show had been properly staged. Now came the cue for that thunderous boom of the base drum which during a vaudeville performance generally brings down the house.

As that elegantly clad arm swung aloft the well-seasoned rope's end in a graceful curve, and brought it down upon the resilient, pillowy object with a resounding swat—with that well-timed snap of the wrist which bespeaks a perfect technique—five hilarious privateers howled their debased delight and tried their best to stand upon their disheveled heads. Meantime, the one would-be pirate joined vociferously in the chorus, spurned into vocal action

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by far more tangible inducements.

The parental whaling must have lasted for almost five minutes. There was no doubt but that it was expertly applied. So expertly indeed that Mr. Kennedy voiced his suspicions that Mr. Hornsby, once upon a time, must have filled the rôle of a village school-teacher; and, when the last but not least artistic stroke finally found its steaming mark, the cook, with a diabolical grin on his swarthy features, complimented the artist with the words:

"Say, meester, I weesh I have you on board two t'ree mont' back, zen Polly he wouold have learn' how peel ze potat'."

Acknowledging the compliment with a superb bow, Mr. Hornsby, none too gently, sat his squirming heir apparent down upon the spar which had served so well as a foot-rest; the hard surface of which, however, for easily understood reasons, caused the young culprit to bounce up again as if it had been the bristling back of an enraged porcupine. Then, wiping his glistening brow with an immaculately clean silk handkerchief, Mr. Hornsby proved that he was a master of words as well as of action by addressing his applauding audience.

"That, gentlemen," he said in a voice full of emotion and lacking even the slightest touch of bravado, "is one of the painful duties which a father is at times unfortunate enough to be forced into performing, and I thank you gentlemen for offering me the opportunity to apply such extreme measures unencumbered by overfond maternal interference. I trust that, with due appreciation of your own undoubted previous efforts, we have succeeded in permanently curing this assinine son of mine of future adventurous aspirations."

We were all deeply impressed by this most realistic entertainment which it would have been impossible to

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duplicate in any of the show houses in shore at any price. We were deeply impressed, too, by Mr. Hornsby's eloquence, and were sincerely sorry that he neglected to pass the customary cigars which, we thought, should always be presented to an appreciative audience at the termination of a show. We were also extremely sorry for the rest of the crew whose unconquerable thirst had driven them in shore prematurely, otherwise they would have seen an act which, if viewed by Robert Burns or Kipling might have been described in verse.

As the last echoes of our cheers reverberated from the now invitingly beckoning shores, there was the uncere-monious bundling of a non-resisting, fat, little package into the steam launch. There was the churning of a saucy little propeller which seemed to mock our own antiquated means of propulsion, and that was the last I ever saw or heard of Aloysius Hornsby, alias Polly, late pirate aspirant, assistant cook and prodigal son.

There is no question in my mind but that Polly remained permanently cured of the blue water fever. Like most of those novel-crazed seekers after adventure he did not have the makings of a real deep water sailor, nor even a second- or third-rate sailor. From all appearances he had, before his flight from home, passed his leisure hours sitting in a comfortable easy chair or by some babbling brook in the shade of a tree, reading and romancing of distant seas where men were leading a wild and care-free life, always miraculously escaping dangers and returning with untold riches or tales which would cause their admiring, envious listeners to idolize and place them on a pedestal as supermen.

Polly was only one of the many boys of that type whom I have met. Many of them physically fit. Many of them apparently having the courage to face dangers.

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Yet, as sailors, they were unfit. Perhaps they were falsely inspired by bravado. In the days when a ship at sea was a little isolated world their show of bravery must have been like a performance before an empty grand stand.

But life at sea—like the men who followed it—even then was changing. I could see the change—trip after trip—every time we returned to civilization. Commercial greed followed upon the heels of the pioneers who had shown the way to those who later forced them from the seas.

We had made an eventful trip. We had discovered one of nature's treasure-places theretofore unnoticed—discovered it through the sharp wit of a girl brought to us incongruously by the combined efforts of Fate and one of the worst scoundrels who ever sailed the South Seas—Dundee Mike.

But Fate had not destined those treasures for us alone. She had brought along Van Asvelt, that evil spirit who had excellent reasons for regarding us askance.

Fate had spared Van's life during that memorable raid in Nura Bay. He had managed to reach Rennell Island. There he had replenished his crew. Then he had gone to Levuka where he had spread the news of our discovery.

So it came about that when we returned to the shoals three months later, we encountered four trading schooners there, each of them working a diving crew. They were not only profiting by our discovery, but also by the Grand Old Man's policy of engaging in peaceful trade with the natives. Van Asvelt's revenge was thorough. He had even disclosed our treaty—for a price, no doubt, as he himself would not have been able to trade there.

Thus, my second and third trips to the Taunu shoals were only dull, uneventful and work-a-day, with but little romance. On our return from the third voyage, the

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shoals were stripped of their wealth.

The shoals are still there, probably not so treacherous—we charted their reefs for the safety of coming generations. They will remain there unless some upheaval of nature removes them, but their treasures are gone forever.

Our regular crew stuck to the ship, as I had hoped, but there were others, good and bad, who came and went with each trip. Never again did we pick up such a useless, unworthy lot of jailbirds as during that memorable first trip to the Taunu shoals.

Cathryn remained true to her vow. The plucky little girl did make both trips to the shoals. Her aunt in Rockhampton protested with her at the outset of each trip, she told me, but then, her aunt was her father's sister—entirely white—whereas she herself—from her mother's side—had the blood of the Maori in her veins. No wonder that she would not forsake the sea!

But when, after the last trip to the shoals, we again left Sydney, I knew that every heart on board was heavy. It seemed strange for us, rovers that we were, not to feel hilarious when we started on that trip—we were on adventure bent, hunting for new shell grounds, instead of settling down to peaceful trade with natives whom we had befriended. But the feeling of comradeship was gone. Cathryn, who had brought it on board, had said her last good-by at the finish of the third voyage. Like a guardian angel, she, with her friendly influence, had kept men, whose nature it was to be quarrelsome, good tempered. Like a trainer among a pack of caged beasts she had tamed us, and now we were to be abandoned again to savagery.

The Captain deplored her absence more than any of us, and I felt assured that my premonition of that morning in Sydney, when she and I had watched the ebbing tide from the rail, was correct. I had learned since that he

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had a wife living in Nova Scotia, that an unhappy home life had driven him to the South Seas, but he was too decent to deceive Cathryn.

Our luck seemed to have changed from then on. Our trip was not a success.

We had followed a rumour that there were rich shell beds somewhere off the north-west coast of Choiseul, but after months of cruising in those desolate waters we found we were on a fool's errand. We had been used to quick and rich trips, and the tedious trade in goods other than pearl shell, with the hostile natives on that iron-bound shore, seemed like a waste of time to us. Therefore, in utter disgust, we again turned southward toward the Bougainville Straits.

One morning, as we passed the reefs of Oema, shortly after sunrise, Mr. Kennedy sighted what looked like a whaleboat adrift. It was a rather unusual discovery in that out-of-the-way part of the sea, so we veered off our course to investigate.

The boat itself proved to be a useless, partly-burned piece of wreckage, but on the bottom planking was the prostrate body of a white man. The poor fellow was still alive when we picked him up, although his left arm had been bitten off by a shark, and despite our efforts he died shortly afterward. But we succeeded in getting a fragment of his story.

He was the mate of the trading schooner *Dorset*. They had come to investigate a rumour of a rich shell deposit off the coast of Bougainville just opposite Oema, and had found the treasure not far to the west of the mouth of a little river. But they had not reckoned on the vicious nature of young Koho, the Bougainville chief who had broken off all intercourse with white men. Consequently, the little *Dorset*, not being manned to withstand the as-

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sault, was plundered and set afire.

The mate had saved himself from the raid by jumping overboard, but before he managed to reach the burning whaleboat the shark got at him. Meanwhile, the schooner, also on fire, drifted over to Choiseul.

That night we anchored near the unfriendly shore of Bougainville, but there was no rest for us. We spent the entire night repelling hostile canoes. Koho, much encouraged by his successful raid on the schooner, now tried his luck on the bark. His inborn hatred for white men was only intensified by the repeated repulses he met with from us.

In the morning the Captain was disgusted.

"We're a lot of damn fools," he growled. "Here we're just come from one wild-geese chase and start right in on another—just because a delirious stiff dropped a dying hint.

"I'm tired of shooting niggers; let's get out of here."

I had an instinctive feeling—a strong one—that we would never have heaved anchor that morning if our guiding spirit had been on board as she was in Guadalcanar.

We set sail for the Banks Islands—to Vanua Lava—only to meet with more disappointments.

I shall not speak of that dreary trip. That was when Bunk—good, loyal Bunk—lost his life, and Bunk deserves more than just a chapter in this book. Bunk deserves a biography all to himself.

When once more we returned to Sydney, after almost a year's absence, I had a surprise that almost staggered me. Captain McPurden was to leave the South Pacific. He was going back to Nova Scotia, and he was going to take the old ship along with him.

Now came a hard fought battle between my two inner

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selves. Should I remain loyal to the ship, or should I stick to the seas which I had learned to regard as home?

Cockney, one of my best friends on board, refused to leave the South Seas. He declared that if I went with the ship I would come back.

I did go with the ship. I felt that I could not leave the Old Man. He had been like a father to me.

That trip around the Horn seemed like leaving the world behind. We were going north—closer and closer to civilization which I had learned to despise. North, past the tropics, farther and farther away from the golden shores where black men were eating each other, nearer and nearer to the shores of pretense where white men were deceiving each other.

Mile after mile reeled astern—thousands of them—and with each mile I began to realize more and more that Cockney had been right.

I had money, plenty of it, for the South Seas had been kind to me; but what good was all that money when once staked against the unfavourable odds of western civilization. Meagre wages earned on some hooker would have reached just as far. One month of lingering up North—hilarious lingering, I admit—proved to me how soon a fool and his money may be parted.

With that lesson thoroughly impressed upon my memory, I shipped for Australia—not as mate, but before the mast—dead broke.

CHAPTER XVI

I SHIP AS MATE ON THE *ONTONG*

ON my return to the South Pacific, nine months after I had left it—more than four years since I had first felt its grip—I secured a berth on a trader. It did not take long. I was acquainted among the clan and was considered an experienced hand.

The trader was the schooner *Ontong*, hailing from Melbourne, but hardly ever touching at that port. I shipped as her mate. "Shipped," I am calling it, though we did not ship like other sailors, before a shipping master, as they did on legitimate vessels. We carried no papers or records. A man simply went on board, made himself known to the skipper, and if the latter was sufficiently impressed with the applicant and thought that he had about the right amount of experience, it was—a drink, sling your duds on board, and the pact was complete. The vessel was the skipper's property—or at least she was assumed to be—and no one but he worried about who was manning her.

Again I found myself on the adventure path, and again, as at the outset of my first trip with the *Emma P.*, Fate was to open a new chapter in my life, surpassing all my previous expectations. I was to meet Bully Hayes, the man of mystery, the man who came from no-one-knew-where and who finally vanished into the unknown.

There were many rumours about Bully Hayes, but most of them were merely imaginative. It has even been stated

that Bully Hayes was only a character of fiction. Nevertheless, John Bullard Hayes existed in the flesh—both as a pirate and as a slaver.

Rumours and truth are sometimes closely allied. That was the case with the rumours about Malay pirates in the Little Coral Sea. There **really were** Malay pirates operating there, and bad ones at that.

Rumours were also abroad to the effect that Bully Hayes was cooperating with the Malay pirates in the Little Coral Sea. They even went so far as to accuse Bully of double-crossing his brown-skinned confederates whenever, in his own judgment, their usefulness to him was ended.

That those rumours had a sound foundation was evidenced by the fact that, whenever the pirates captured a prize, they promptly encountered one of Bully Hayes's vessels, manned by his best fighting men—always considerably better armed than the pirates. Then, of course, the prize would go to the account of Bully Hayes—the spoils to the victor.

There was good logic in that system. Such a course of procedure was much safer than to capture a prize directly from its rightful owners. The old free-lance traders were always well armed, and they could put up a good fight when attacked on the high seas or anywhere else. If they happened to be sufficiently prepared to defend themselves successfully against pirates, it was the part of wisdom to leave them alone. And Bully's forces did not suffer any untoward consequences. Of course, the loss of the brown men did not cause him any scruples. There were always more of them who were willing to take a chance if set on the trail of a successful trader. It followed, too, that if the pirates won out—which they invariably did when attacking a small vessel—they in turn

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would be sufficiently weakened in the ensuing fight to make them an easy prey for the Bullies.

Of course the Bullies took good care that none of their victims escaped to carry the news to their kinsmen. Hardly ever did a member of a raided trader's crew survive, for the Malay pirates were thorough in their work. Any chance survivors naturally fell into the hands of his rescuers, the Bullies. If sufficiently grateful, he joined forces with them, if not—well the ocean was large and deep.

“We drink today and fight tomorrow,
We go to Hell and there's no sorrow.”

None of the old free-lance traders were registered vessels. If one of them did not turn up again—well, there was a vessel lost and soon forgotten. Who would worry about a lot of vagabonds anyway? There were always others taking their places, coming from no-one-cared-where.

* * * * *

It was near high noon, about thirty miles north of Cape Deliverance. What little breeze there was did not fill the *Ontong's* sails enough to keep them from swinging with spasmodic jerks in unison with the schooner's slatternly rolling on the unbroken swell.

But the slight calm failed to worry us. We were returning from a successful trip, and were all in good spirits. Five months of prospecting among the Nada Atols and the Lusancay reefs had netted us several thousand pounds' worth of pearls and more than double their value in unblemished shell. Soon the wind would set in again, and then we would be on the homeward stretch.

The distant peak of Rossel Island, looming well above

the horizon, meant nothing to me just then, except that it formed an excellent mark for checking up on observations while I stood on deck with my sextant, watching the sun approaching the meridian.

All other hands, excepting a man at the wheel—Captain Richard and Hall, the supercargo, included—were below for their noon meal. It was one of those days when traders took it easy while under way.

There was a sail showing just above the horizon, almost in line with the Island. That, of course, should not have meant anything to me nor to the man at the wheel, for sails had a right to appear anywhere at sea, and we were too far apart to worry about running afoul of each other. But somehow—I don't know why—each glance at that sail reminded me of the value of our cargo. A fool notion, I will admit, but notions do come into our heads without apparent reason.

It must have been the course the stranger was steering and the speed at which he seemed to top the horizon, that held my attention. There may have been a note of anxiety in my voice when I addressed the helmsman.

"What do you make out o' that rag there?" I asked, motioning with the sextant in the direction of the sail. "Seems to me she's coming up pretty fast with hardly any breeze."

The fellow looked at me with what I thought was almost contempt.

"Aw, that's only a Chink trader—sandal-wood lugger or somethin' like that—nothin' t' worry over."

Not satisfied with that optimistic conclusion, and a bit riled at the fellow's sneer, I scrutinized the distant object through the eye-piece of the sextant. What I saw did not reassure me in the least. Through the glass I could now make out part of the hull, on each side of which

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large sweeps were dipping and blinking in the sunlight with clock-like regularity. No chink trader would be in so much of a hurry to clear a safe weather shore at such a distance.

The helmsman's optimism was not yet shaken by my discovery, nevertheless I went below for a high-powered telescope and to call Captain Richard on deck.

The Captain made but a brief examination of the suspicious-looking craft. He remarked that the oriental cut of her sail and the rapidity of her approach were none too pleasing.

"What would you do?" he demanded of me, as if doubting his own judgment. "Do you really think that fellow's a raider?"

I had been in Levuka and had heard various rumours about Bully Hayes, and though I was not fully convinced about the truth of such rumours, the value of our cargo made me feel rather cautious.

"There's but one thing I would do," I replied with decision. "Get all hands on deck and deal out the guns and cutlasses. If I'm wrong, you fellows can give me the ha-ha, but I'll bet a hundred to one that the fellow's coming for us. He's had his eye on us a long while. As long's we were in touch with the niggers and had a lot of native divers on board he wouldn't tackle us, but now that we're alone and becalmed he thinks we're sure meat for him."

It was the work of only a few minutes to prepare all hands for action. Altogether there were but ten men on board of the little schooner. No one knew the odds we might have to cope with in case of a fight, but one thing was certain: even if the other vessel were only a small one, the odds would be at least two to one in favour of the raiders. Those brown cutthroats knew the superiority

of the white man's weapons, and they always took good care to offset this advantage by sheer numbers.

Another advantage in favour of the pirates was the fact that traders hardly ever knew what their intentions were until they were about ready to board. From a distance they looked like innocent fishermen. And once they were alongside, what use were the best high-powered rifles?

The stranger had come near enough by now to enable us on board of the schooner to distinguish her type. She was something like a cross between a Chinese junk and a Malay proa—a very unusual craft, nearly the same length as the *Ontong*, but much narrower in beam. She was only a "single sticker," carrying but one enormous bamboo-ribbed sail. Her towering bow and stern, as well as her midship structure of bamboo and matting—extending fully two-thirds of her length—made it impossible to see a single human being on board of her. Even the men who were operating the enormous sculling sweep on her after-guard were hidden from view, though judging by the size of the sweep, it must have taken four men to work it. There were three large sweeps extending from each side—at least two men on each of them. That could be estimated by the power with which they were worked. Her approach surely justified suspicion, but it was no use to send bullets into those massive teak sides, or into that thick covering of matting on the superstructure. To have done so would have been a useless waste of ammunition.

This was a tense moment. Our little crew on the *Ontong* were practically helpless. Soon the other would be alongside. Then the deck would be swarming with bloodthirsty savages—armed to the teeth with saw-edged creeses and hatchets—and then. . . . Those devils never

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were known to give quarter—they loved to kill. And any unfortunate who fell into their hands alive was given ample opportunity for regret that merciful death had not overtaken him during the combat.

During the short time it took to get ready for her the hostile vessel had decreased the distance steadily. There was no more question as to her mission. Silently the *Ontong's* crew were listening now to the creaking of the straining sweeps. Grim determination could be read on every face as they waited with their rifle barrels resting on the rail. They were all made of the stuff needed on the old free-lance traders. Ready to fight to the finish. No medals, glory or cheers for reward. Men who never performed for the applause of an audience—but their lives would have to be paid for dearly.

Only fifty yards left. Still there was nothing to shoot at. A medley of babbling voices could now be heard coming from under the arched shelter, and by that peculiar sing-song of their jabber I was able to place them.

"Water Dyaks!" I reminded the skipper by my side, to break that ghastly suspense. "They are the fiercest cut-throats of them all, and they're a long way from home. That means they're a daring lot. . . . Bring our head to their bow. . . . Don't let them get us amidships. We've got steerage-way."

Captain Richard did not reply, but he nodded his acknowledgment.

"Port your helm!" came his unwavering, quiet command; then: "All hands aft! Get aft of the deck house and give them a volley when they board. That'll give you time to reload before they get aft. Have your cutlasses handy!"

These were the skipper's last words. The crash came as soon as the schooner had swung into the wind towards

the raider, and both vessels met head on. The pirate's high slanting bow caught under the *Ontong's* jib-boom and snapped it like a pipe-stem. The sloping transom of her head caught against the end of the bowsprit, which went through it as if it had been pasteboard, and the two heads were locked together like the horns of stags in combat.

The pirates had not figured on this manoeuvre. Their yells of fury drowned all other noises. A side-on meeting would have suited them much better as it would have made boarding less hazardous. The falling jib-boom had knocked down the forepart of their shelter, and thus only three at a time could crawl out from under. Also, the bowsprit, with its chain bob-stay and tangled up head-gear, kept the heads of the vessels so far apart that the boarders would be compelled to run along the slippery spar in single file, which might mean a heavy toll.

But that prospect did not seem to daunt their courage. Those who crawled from under the fore part of the shelter crouched behind the bulwarks of their vessel, for safety against rifle bullets, and waiting for their number to be sufficiently increased for a rush en masse. Others were coming from aft, and were scurrying like rats over the cover. Some of those went down before our deadly hail of bullets which were now raining on them as fast as our little gun on the schooner could load and fire.

Most of those who were shot went overboard—some of them, like wounded, savage beasts, threshing and clawing at the matting of the sloping top, others, killed outright, rolling down limp. Those—the majority—who reached the fore-deck crouched low, waiting for the command for boarding. Meanwhile they returned the white man's fire with old flintlock pistols, and all their shots fell short, which only intensified their fury.

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Savage yells and threats filled the air, even louder than the incessant spattering of the rifles and pistols. These and the numerous flashing creeses, waving threateningly above the bulwarks, created a pandemonium never to be forgotten—if, indeed, one lived to remember.

There seemed to be no end to the number of lithe, brown men coming forth, bedecked in their turbans and red or yellow loin-cloths. It was surprising that the little craft could hold so many.

Fully thirty of them were now crowded together on the fore-deck, protected against our rifles by the bulwarks of the two vessels. No more were coming from aft, although there must have been at least an equal number there in reserve. They knew no fear, but they would not foolhardily expose themselves to the rifle bullets, and thus uselessly weaken their number before the battle.

Now there came a lull in the incessant jabbering which they had kept up. They were getting ready for the rush. To make the first onslaught overwhelming, some of them would doubtless make a direct leap from rail to rail. The distance of ten feet would not give pause to those sons of nature.

Our crew on the *Ontong* was as yet unscathed. With rifles ready to take toll as soon as that brown tide began to flow in upon them, they silently waited, knowing that it would be for an instant only—that they were then bound to be overwhelmed. The odds against us were too great.

The only sound now was the groaning creak of wood rubbing upon wood—unhealthy, weird groans, as if the two vessels under the feet of the opponents were lamenting the tragedy about to take place.

All this, since the collision, had been a matter of moments, but to us, it seemed an eternity. Then, as I thought of those devils crouching there in comparative safety, with

our masts towering above their hiding-place, it struck me that an opportunity to inflict more punishment upon them had been neglected. Momentarily I felt resentment against the skipper, for I thought that he had unwittingly jeopardized our lives.

"To the rigging with your guns, some of you, quick!" I called out, no longer caring who had the command. "Shoot down on them behind the bulwarks!"

Too late. It seemed as if the Dyaks understood that last hurried order. Even as some four or five of our crew rushed toward the main shrouds, an ear-splitting yell pierced the air. A yell as if all the inmates of the Inferno had broken loose, and at the same time the schooner's tangled head-gear was fairly obscured from view by a cloud of flying brown figures and flashing weapons.

Our rifles were spattering, rifle-locks clicked, and several of the boarders dropped. Some, seemingly checked by the impact of the bullets in mid-air, fell overboard. Others, carried on by the momentum of their flight, were flung in a shapeless, sprawling mass across rail or windlass. But that tide could no more be checked than the onrush of breakers on a beach. Fanatics that they were, death held no terrors for them. Now, since the attack had begun in earnest, they ceased to be individuals. Each became a unit in a many-jointed, brown monster, whose only object was to annihilate its foe with utter disregard for its own innumerable wounds. At last this monster had its footing upon our deck, and was rushing toward us, its severed joints constantly being replaced in increasing numbers by others, coming up from the shelter of the junk.

A few shots, and our rifles were useless, then it was man to man, or rather man against mass—single cutlass

against many creeses. It would soon be all over. Two of our men dropped almost simultaneously at the first clash—they were literally slashed to pieces. I found myself side by side with the Captain and Hall, the supercargo, hacking and stabbing furiously, and at the same time parrying a rain storm of weapons.

It was the bloodiest fight I had ever seen. No quarter given or taken on either side. The whole after deck was a wriggling mass of blood-smeared bodies. It was—kill and be killed, and revenge yourself while succumbing. Those who went down—on both sides—went down fighting as long as breath was in them.

Many of the enemy had been slain, some were mortally wounded, and even while writhing upon the rolling deck, in their last death struggle, they were viciously hacking at the feet and ankles of those of their opponents who came within their reach.

With a single swing of his cutlass Captain Richard parried the thrusts of two creeses at once, but at the same moment a third lunged under his guard and pierced his heart. At once my cutlass landed on the assassin's head with such force that the blade split his head and neck almost down to his shoulder blades, and the end, projecting behind his partly cleft back, took off the hand of another clutching a head-ax.

The sight of this desperate stroke made the rest of my nearest adversaries fall back a few paces, and during this momentary respite, the supercargo, with a quick glance about, noticed that we were the only two left of the crew, and that we had gradually advanced to the forward end of the cabin.

"The rigging!" he panted, seeing that we were within easy reach of the main shrouds. In the flash of an eye both of us had leaped upon the rail and were clambering

up the ratlines. By a hair's breadth we escaped a sortie which surely would have borne us down.

Half a dozen Dyaks made a dash for the rail, intent upon pursuing us, but they stopped short at a command from their leader. From the few words of their language which I understood, I gleaned enough to realize what our fate was to be. The schooner, after being plundered, was to be set afire, and we were to be roasted alive in the rigging. A slow, agonizing death from which there was to be no escape. Our fate was to be the worst of all.

Unmolested, followed only by vicious glances and unmistakable threats, we ascended to the crosstrees. Hall, being unused to climbing the rigging of a rolling vessel, clung to the shrouds with both hands. He would have been unable to put up any defense if we had been followed. As a matter of precaution I descended a little way, and cut several of the ratlines to make pursuit more difficult in case the savages should change their minds. I intended to hold on until the last.

The Dyaks, however, paid no further attention to us. Some of them entered the cabin to rummage around for the more valuable goods, such as the pearls which they knew to be on board. Others ripped the tarpaulins off the hatches and disappeared below. Still others proceeded to disentangle the heads of the two vessels in order to bring them alongside of each other. They worked hard and fast, and some of them occasionally relieved their feelings by shaking a threatening weapon at their captives aloft.

The deck was a horrible spectacle to behold from above. The whole after part was covered with blood and terribly lacerated bodies, some of which were sliding to and fro, in the slippery gore, with every roll of the vessel.

In addition to the eight white bodies there were at least

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a score of the marauders lying on the planking—gruesome evidence of how the defenders had avenged themselves. Of the surviving twoscore hustling greedily about, not one bothered with the dead now. Those unsightly cadavers were left to the swarms of insects that seemed to have appeared from nowhere all at once.

For nearly an hour we sat there upon the swaying cross-trees, in the glaring sun, watching the gruesome scene below. We were hopelessly awaiting our own horrible fate, and meanwhile we were to be subjected to the tortures of thirst, such as can only be experienced after extreme exertion while breathing the odours of steaming corpses and blood under a tropical sun. But at least, during these moments of waiting, we could observe with satisfaction the punishment that we and our dead ship-mates had inflicted on the enemy. Fully one-third of their original number would never enjoy the fruits of their raid.

That, however, did not in the slightest degree affect our chances—we had nothing to hope for but an agonizing death. True, there were several guns scattered about the deck—good, useful weapons. With two of them, and sufficient ammunition—but what was the use. The guns were beyond our reach. Hall looked down at them longingly—he was an expert shot.

“This is Hell,” he groaned more in disgust than as if lamenting his plight. “Here we got to sit and wait for those devils to roast us or drown us when they get good and ready. Why in Hell don’t they pick up one of them guns and shoot us? I’ve got a notion to jump overboard and end it!”

I was watching several sinister objects slowly circling about near the ship. As I pointed at the sharp, triangular fins, cutting the surface above those objects, I could not help thinking of how horrible, at times, death can be.

"There is one reason why they don't shoot us," I said, gazing at the sharks with a shudder. "They want to enjoy the sport of seeing us gobbled up alive. We are to have our choice of either being roasted alive or eaten alive. Besides," I added with more contempt for the pirates, "I don't think they know how to load the breechloaders."

Before I had finished that last comment, Hall gripped my arm. He pointed in the direction of Rossel Island. I saw the light of hope in his face.

"A sail!" He almost whispered the word as if afraid that those on deck might overhear and understand him.

I looked. It was indeed a sail just above the horizon.

"Yes," said Hall, "and it looks like a white man's sail. It's coming this way." Then his voice lost its hopeful note. "But she's only a small craft, and those devils'll make short work of her, too! There are too many of them. God, if we only had a gun up here, we could be picking off a few of them while we're waiting!"

He kept his eyes on the distant sail. The Malays, being so much lower down, had evidently not seen it as yet, though the vessel seemed to be coming nearer. She was headed toward us, and her sails were full—evidence that a freshening breeze was on the way. But of what help could she be with a small crew? She would soon share the *Ontong's* fate. Her crew probably did not know that danger was lurking here, directly in their path.

The puff of wind, light as it was, now reached the *Ontong* and began to steady her flapping sails. The cooling breeze at least promised some relief from the terrible heat to which Hall and I were exposed up on the crosstrees. But it also brought the schooner under control of her sails, and who knew what course the raiders might steer? They might select a course which would keep us from meeting the other vessel. Then our last

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ray of hope would be shattered. Thus we waited between hope and despair.

Then it seemed as if fortune were going to smile on us once more.

The leader of the pirates had noticed the steadying sails. He shouted a command, and in obedience a man ran to the wheel and headed the *Ontong*, with the raider made fast alongside, toward Rossel Island, while the others continued with the work of transferring the cargo. We now experienced difficulty in restraining our excitement. From the top we could see that they were heading directly for the approaching vessel, and that an unavoidable meeting would be brought about so much the sooner. At least there was one more fighting chance.

For half an hour we watched the distance decreasing. We were able now to make out the stranger to be a ketch, possibly a little smaller than the *Ontong*. She was fast—covering easily two miles to every one of ours—but then our ship was encumbered by having to drag along that lumbering junk. Even in our precarious predicament our sailor's pride would not permit us to admit that our vessel could be so easily outsailed.

Anxiously we watched the other vessel heaving and dipping over the easy swell. As yet they had given no sign of having taken notice of us; nevertheless, to our eyes she looked more like something sent from Above than anything earthly. It seemed as if every dip of that graceful bow was intended to nod encouragement to us not to give up hope.

Suddenly there was a commotion on our deck. The pirates had seen the ketch bearing down upon them, and amid a babel of voices and vicious howls, the work on the cargo stopped. They started at once to prepare for battle again, and, to our surprise, they picked up the

rifles of their victims and began to examine them in earnest.

Under less serious circumstances the ensuing debates might have been amusing to anyone who could have witnessed and understood them. It was plain that none of the Dyaks had ever seen a breechloader before. Some of them insisted upon trying to charge the barrels from the muzzle ends with their old powder flasks. Others were excitedly brandishing the cartridges which they had picked up, and were attempting to force them into the muzzles. The cartridges, of course, were much too large, and there were a lot of puzzled pirates.

They knew only too well that the white men had been using those trick guns, also that they had been loading them in remarkably short time. But how? That was the question. Wildly jabbering, some of them glanced aloft at their prisoners. Hall looked amused.

"Lord!" he chuckled, "are they going to ask us to show them how to work the guns?"

I had no time for joking, being too much interested in one individual in particular who seemed to be more persistent than all the rest in his futile efforts. The fellow seemed suddenly to have lost his temper. He struck the primer of the cartridge a violent blow with the butt of his creese. The cartridge exploded and knocked him silly. This was too much for the audience in the rigging. In spite of our plight, we gave vent to uproarious laughter.

To find themselves ridiculed was a little more than the Dyaks could stand. Their temper is none too gentle at best. Those fellows up there were bewitching the guns, and this was the last straw. Like so many cats, a number of them sprang into the rigging to make short work of those white devils.

We both had held on to our cutlasses, and as the nar-

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rowing shrouds above, as well as the cut ratlines, made it possible for only two at a time to approach the cross-trees, in short order three of them dropped to the deck with their heads split open. Possibly, if they had kept up the attack, we could have taken care of all of them from our unusual vantage-place, but there was no need.

The ketch meanwhile had approached to within rifle range. Suddenly a volley rang out on board of her, and all the brown men who had taken to the rigging dropped on deck or overboard. Now pandemonium again broke loose. Howls of fury filled the air, even louder than the cheers we gave to our rescuers. Some of the infuriated pirates grabbed hatchets and attacked the butt of the mast. It was evident that, no matter what the outcome was to be, their two prisoners should not escape. But there were only a few strokes of the hatchets—the choppers almost immediately went down before the deadly fire of those on board the ketch. Two dashed toward the weather shrouds, intent upon cutting the lanyards so that the mast might carry away, but they dropped even before they could make a single slash.

We marvelled at the marksmanship on board of the other vessel. Ten of our captors went down before they had a chance to fight.

The lust for battle urged us to descend and take a hand in the execution, but that would have been worse than foolhardy. The odds against us were still too great. We would have to wait until the other vessel came alongside.

No man could now be kept at the wheel. Those dead shots would have picked them off as fast as they could have taken that exposed station. Thus without a pilot, the *Ontong* with the junk moored alongside went with her head up into the wind. There was nothing the pirates

could do but crouch in the shelter of the schooner's low rail and await the hand to hand engagement.

Ten minutes of this suspense, then the ketch passed close abaft of us. This gave the marksmen on board of the ketch a chance to take pot shots at the crouching figures behind our rail, three more of whom were promptly laid out for shark bait.

Now came the ripping sound of the ketch's headsails tearing down on their stays, as she shot up into the wind and drew up rapidly to the *Ontong's* side. Challengingly her battle-flag went up on her mizzen peak. With their heads hidden below the rail, the howling demons below us scattered a random volley of slugs from their old flintlocks in her direction. Their shots were greeted with scoffs and jeers by the mob crowding to her rail.

When we saw that flag—the trader's flag with the crudely constructed skull and bones in the lower yellow field—and when we saw the host of fighters swarming on the little vessel's deck, we knew she was no ordinary trader, and that the pirates were beaten at their own bloody game. They were about to meet super-pirates. It was one of Bully Hayes's crews.

Fully forty men reached for the *Ontong's* rail with long pike-pointed, boarding hooks, and almost at the same instant the cutlasses of twenty more clashed against as many creeses. At that moment Hall and I slid down the back stays and straight into the fray.

The battle was short but furious. Although the pirates realized that they were confronting a superior force of better armed men than they had previously encountered, they were not of a calibre to surrender without a fight. They themselves never gave quarter, and they never expected it from their adversaries.

A single survivor, and Bully Hayes might never have

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another chance to use any of their kin for his strategic schemes. Hence the rule which seemed to apply itself whenever piracy was involved: Dead men tell no tales!

Although the Bullies suffered no casualties in this fight—thanks to the gallant defense of the *Ontong's* crew who had taken such heavy toll from the enemy—many of them were wounded. That, however, the Bullies always expected in encounters of this kind.

Fortune did not favour me now as it had in the previous engagement, which Hall and I miraculously survived with no more than a few scratches.

I had but just got down to the deck, swinging my cutlass with my right hand, and holding to the back-stay with my left, when I found myself confronting the chief of the pirates, a panther in human form. With a vicious swing of his creese and the howl of an infuriated beast, the savage made a slash for my neck. It was only by chance that I saw the flash of the ugly weapon. In the nick of time my blade went up to ward off the blow. But because of my awkward, half suspended position, his sharp blade slipped past the upturned point of my cutlass and caught me across the left wrist before I had a chance to release my hold on the stay. It was due to luck rather than skill that my own blade had broken the force of that blow, otherwise the creese would assuredly have severed my hand like the head of a butchered chicken. As it was, the wound was so severe that, from my hand which gripped the stay a few inches above the level of my eyes, a shower of hot gore squirted from a parted artery, and almost blinding me, completely screened my adversary. I let go of the stay and struck out blindly, not knowing until hearing about it several days later, that my very first lunge had all but taken off the Dyak's head.

To right and left I felt the edge of my blade impinging

upon steel, and hacking into flesh, while my strength rapidly ebbed, and the blood flowing from my wound and probably blending with that of my opponent's, spattered over my face and body.

Suddenly I felt my arms pinioned to my sides by many hands from behind. I felt something hard and heavy strike my head, and my brain began to reel with a roaring noise that surged in my ears. I felt my body grow limp, and as the roaring floated away from my ears, it became fainter like the sound of a passing voice.

"Boy!" that voice seemed to say, as if from another world; "that is the curse of the pearls!"

Then everything turned black.

* * * * *

With the first sign of returning consciousness—it was nothing more than an inherent sense of existence—I seemed to have a confused idea that I was in darkness, but my thoughts were not yet sufficiently clear to let that cause me any concern. My sense of smell seemed to be acute. I felt half conscious of a loathing for a foul, stagnant odour about me, such as might be given off by damp old straw and rotting tropical vegetation. It seemed as if my mind were trying to wrestle with the problem of how to free myself from that annoying smell. Those sub-conscious efforts must have gradually dispersed the haze from my brain. I began to be aware of wondering as to the cause of the darkness.

Then, little by little, consciousness of the sense of touch began to return and things about me took form. I was seized by an indescribable feeling of fear. I began to realize that I was on my back and was twisting around—that my discomfort had been annoying me for quite a long time.

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The motion brought on a violent throbbing in my left arm, and in the attempt to straighten it I felt that it was in a sling with the forearm and hand swathed in bandages. This made me forget the darkness for the time being. Lying still again, I tried to recollect myself.

The memory of my latest adventure now gradually dawned upon my mind, and I started to puzzle over my present whereabouts, and how I could have come to the place I was in. One thing was plain to me immediately: I was not on board of a ship; sailor's instinct told me that—but it was too dark to see any part of my surroundings, and that gave me a rather uneasy feeling.

Suddenly I felt that, whatever my abode might be, I was sharing it with someone else. I listened, holding my breath, and beyond the stillness I heard the nearby rustling of trees, and the distant rumbling of breakers. But that was not all, for within only a few feet of my place of repose there was the sound of heavy breathing.

Someone was asleep, therefore it must be night. That discovery eased my mind considerably. My first thought as my eyes failed to pierce the darkness, was that I might have been struck blind. Now I waited, becoming more and more anxious to know, as the minutes passed, who or what my companion might be, but feeling that sooner or later he would awaken, and that then I would be able to obtain some information about my strange surroundings.

Presently—it must have been more than an hour later—a faint square of light began to shape itself not far from my feet, and I heard a rustling sound as if from someone stirring on a pile of straw.

"Who's that?" I challenged abruptly, intent upon catching the fellow unawares.

There was a sudden startled commotion as if somebody had jumped up near that square of light, and then came

Hall's cheerful voice: "Hello! You back on earth? Well, I'll be damned!"

"That you, Hall? Where in Hell are we anyway?" I came right back, feeling rather elated, considering the circumstances.

In reply I heard the sound of a stifled yawn, then Hall said:

"We are on Rennel Island, in a shack that some nigger must have built centuries ago. How's your wing? Think you'll be able to get up? Gee, but I'm glad to hear your voice again."

I painfully raised myself on my right elbow. The loss of so much blood had left me rather weak, and I began to feel a dull pain in my head. Its surging reel brought back more recollections.

"Tell me, Hall," I asked beginning to take an interest in life, "did I get socked on the coco? This slashed port tack sure didn't knock me out. How long have we been here? What's become of the *Ontong*? This is a Hell of a place to dump a white man!"

"Easy, old man! Easy, now!" Hall parried persuasively. "You sure were socked on the top. Just give me a chance to give you the dope, one thing at a time, and don't fly off the handle starting to kill niggers when there ain't any. Lord, but you're a holy terror when you get a-going!"

The light, coming in through the opening, began to disclose the interior of a small, and judging by the foul smell, very old grass hut. As my eyes became more accustomed to it, I saw that the only furnishings the shack contained were two piles of matting, one of which was serving me as a cot, while on the other my companion was sitting with his hands clasped over his knees. Suddenly I was aware of an unmistakable slack feeling in the

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regions of the belt, and my tongue felt like a lump of cork.

"Gee, but I'm hungry and thirsty!" I complained before Hall could speak again, meanwhile forgetting all other worries.

Hall laughed.

"That's better!" he said. "That sounds a little more like you. I've been kind of preparing for that. Here, take a drink of water, then take a swig at this." Handing me a calabash of water and a flask of rum, he continued: "I've got a little hard tack here to exercise your jaws on till we can go on board of the ketch and look for something fit to eat."

"The ketch! What's the matter with the *Ontong*? You don't mean to say that she's——"

"Wait! Wait!" Hall broke in. "The *Ontong*'s on her way to Levuka by now—go ahead and get something under your belt and let me tell you all about it."

I decided that, as a patient listener, I would get the mess straightened out quicker than by asking rapid-fire questions, and as my desire for food made itself essential, I awaited Hall's forthcoming narrative with patient expectation and attacked the obstinate hard-tack with equally obstinate zest. After helping himself to a drink of the rum, Hall began:

"The trouble with you was that you were too damn anxious to get into the scrap; but that's done. You slashed that copper-skinned bandit's throat in fine shape, so you're quits on that. But you wanted to keep on fighting even when there wasn't a damn nigger left, and it took a bunch of the Bullies to hold you and quiet you down.

"Then along came that big red-headed skipper of their's—Mike, they call him—and socked you over the head

with a pike-hook. He wanted to feed you to the sharks along with the niggers, but the crew wouldn't stand for it—told him that a scrapper like you'd make a damn good Bully, and gave me the job to look after you—else maybe, I'd been getting mine.

"There wasn't room enough on board of the ketch for us, so they put you in this old shack. I thought that'd be a lot better than have you lay on deck till you were all right again."

"Yes, but we were about three-hundred an' thirty miles away from here. Who took the schooner?" I broke in impatiently.

"Three-hundred and thirty miles away from here!" Hall laughed indulgently. "Say, do you know that you've been a stiff for the last three nights an' two days? No wonder, with all the soup you lost, and then that whack on the skull after all we've been through. Say, that crew of the ketch acted pretty damn decent with our boys that got killed. Took 'em in shore an' buried 'em on Rossel Island—said that fighters like them deserved better than being used for shark feed. But that big son of a—of a skipper o' their's would have fed them all to the sharks if he'd had his way. Lord! I never saw so many sharks—gave me the creeps the way they gobbled up the dead niggers. It was that skipper who sailed off with the *Ontong*—said he's going to see Bully Hayes who's in Levuka now. It looked to me's if that crew ain't got much use for that fellow Mike—kind of a bully among bullies—you know what I mean."

It seemed as if the mere mention of that name guided my mind into involuntary retrospection.

"I'd like to see that bird," I grumbled, absently; "Mike—hm—Mike . . . D'you know somehow I got a feelin' there's somethin' else I've got to settle with that cuss?"

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He's coming back, ain't he?"

"Oh, he's got to come back all right—in about a month," Hall assured me. "He wouldn't dare to try beating the Bullies—they'd hunt him down sooner or later." Then he suddenly branched off as if anxious to change the subject to put my mind at ease: "The boys tell me that Bully Hayes is pretty damn square with the fellows that stick to him."

That brought on a new line of thought.

"Speaking about the devil, while we're at it," I interrupted him with a queer feeling of suspicion, "it does look peculiar how that ketch came along just about the time she did. Don't you think so?"

"Well, come to think of it—yes. I s'pose you've heard some o' the yarns around Levuka at some time or other?"

Mentally I was summing up the recent events.

"Yes—lots of 'em—And what's more, I believe 'em too—now." I vented my mind, becoming more cynical as I proceeded. "The whole game around here's nothin' but dog eat dog. If you want to eat here, you got to be dog and eat dog yourself!"

Hall laughed.

"You seem to be satisfied to let it go at that," he said. "You been away from the nigger islands not so long, and I see you're round here again."

That struck home. I knew that no pretense would deceive Hall.

"What of it if I am?" I came back, beginning to probe his sentiments. "And now we're here, marooned on Rennell, ain't we? The rest of our crew's gone to the devil and nobody'll give a damn, so why should we? If we want our share now, we might's well go blackbirding with the Bullies, or even squobbing as far's that matters.

"What th' Hell, Hall, in the olden days there were deacons of the churches who were part owners of black cargo luggers. Do you know that in the coast ports we got the name of being bloody pirates anyway? We got the name and we might's well have the game."

Hall pondered over this for a while. My resolution may have surprised him, but he was inclined to ascribe it to my condition. Still, what could we do? We were stranded on that God-forsaken island. Ship on some trader with the fill-in crew? The bums? Never!

"Well it beats me how that Bully Hayes bunch can keep it up." He evaded the alternative of directly committing himself. "It's a wonder that some government doesn't take a hand in it."

That was like showing a red rag to a bull.

"Governments be damned! Who the Hell cares around here?" I snorted in contempt. "Governments authorize their navies to piracy don't they? We're our own government, and we give the niggers a fighting chance."

The thought of being so far removed from organized interference brought Mike to my mind again, and realizing my disabled condition, I added mournfully:

"All I hope is that my port tack'll be all right by the time this Mike gets back. D'you know what's become of my carver?—the one with the brass hilt. I'm used to its swing."

Hall grinned with gleeful anticipation. Mike had no impressed him very favorably, and he knew of my fondness for that sort of sport.

"You'll get a chance at him," he consoled. "Don't worry about your cutlass. I've taken care of that. But be sure you're all right again before you start in on *tha* bird—he's a bad one they tell me." He jumped to his

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feet. "Come on, let's get out of this—this place stinks. Can you walk?"

"I guess so," I replied, staggering up. "I feel a bit shaky in the legs, but I'll be able to navigate all right. Feels like I'm half stewed."

The hut, which had been our domicile, was located on a little elevation, overlooking the bay which I remembered from previous visits to the Island. When we stepped outside, the sun was well above the horizon, and we could see the ketch peacefully riding at anchor in the distance.

The sight of that graceful little hull—now viewed under more normal circumstances than when we first saw her from the *Ontong's* top—at once caused my mind to wander again into the long ago, although I was sure that the vessel was a stranger to me.

"Somehow I feel queer about that tub, Hall," I pondered as we were descending down to the beach. "There's something wrong about her rigging. The way that main-mast is stepped it looks as if it ought to be the fore-mast of a schooner. Then the lines—and the sheer—they'd be fit for a yacht. What's her name? Do you know?"

Hall shrugged his shoulders, as if names meant nothing to him.

"As far's I can find out she ain't got any name on her," he replied. "C'm on, let's get on board and get some grub. I'm starved." Eyeing me almost critically, he burst out: "What's wrong anyway? Think you know something about her? From some other time, I mean."

There was seemingly no sound reason for my feelings, and yet—

"Don't know! But I feel funny about it," was about the only explanation I could think of.

I SHIP AS MATE ON THE *ONTONG*

Hall took me by the arm and helped me down the rough embankment.

“Aw, you’re sick, that’s all. You’ll feel better about it in a couple o’ days. Come, go aboard and get something better than hard-tack.”

CHAPTER XVII

DUNDEE MIKE

THE warm welcome, which the harum scarum crew accorded to us upon our arrival on board of the ketch, did not seem to relieve me of that queer feeling which had taken possession of me at sight of the little vessel. The jovial shoulder slapping, the substantial breakfast which the Lascar cook had prepared, and the many compliments about the fierce fighting ability, they were now crediting us with, were only accepted as mere matters of rough, but well-meant, courtesy. Strangely I was seized by an urgent desire to rummage about the vessel alone. Something forgotten and neglected for several years seemed to call out to me—with even greater force than when I had viewed the graceful hull from the shore. I was certain that I was following a premonition, more than the mere fancy of a sick man.

The day was hot and sticky, and eventually the hilarity of our reception cooled down. The various members of the crew then hunted up their favourite lounging places. Some went in shore to the village, a short distance from the beach, where they could indulge in worldly pleasures among the scum of humanity who were the inhabitants of that part of this disreputable island.

That, at last, brought me the opportunity to look over the vessel at leisure. I paid but little attention to the cabin—which, from all appearances had once been luxuri-

ous—and went down into the hold as soon as I could disengage myself from Hall and the others.

There, looking up at the deck from below, I could see the old pardners of a schooner's main-mast—planked over from above, but still visible from beneath, between the deck beams. I had known all the while that the vessel had been built to be a schooner.

With my suspicions more than well founded I now started to look about. There was nothing much to be seen—it was no more than the nearly empty, repulsively damp hold of a blackbirder. Volcanic rock ballast piled up to the height of the keelson, and a number of stall-like, rough wooden bunks built in. Palm leaf and fibre matting—mouldy and ragged—strewn about promiscuously. Foul, nauseating sour odours, everywhere—worse than a Solomon Island *kamal*.

However, despite my prevailing weakness, I seemed to be impervious to the stench. I looked at the roughly built bunks with the interest of an explorer examining the interior of a newly discovered cave. There was nothing to be admired about the workmanship of the stalls. Everything had been done by unskilled hands in rip-tear-slam-bang style. Not to give comfort to the unfortunate occupants of the hold, but only with an eye to efficiency, to crowd as much human freight into those rank cramped quarters as possible. It was a dungeon of misery when occupied, a filthy, insect and rat-infested, pest-hole when vacated.

Presently a piece of dirty board—once painted white—nailed to the end of one of the stalls, caught my eye. Not much to attract one's attention, but a splintered, scroll-ornamented end made it look like something decidedly out of place in there. Then, there were small patches of gold leaf, still clinging to the scrolls, which gave

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mute evidence that it had once been a name board of a ship, entirely foreign to those waters.

Now it seemed as if the very soul of the ship was calling to me for justice, as, trembling and sweating from weakness and excitement, I made my way over the ragged ballast rocks which covered the bottom.

I took hold of the protruding end with my sound hand, and pulled with every ounce of my remaining strength, until the partly rotted board broke, leaving only a piece of it in my hand. But my efforts had not been in vain, for there, neatly carved into the piece of wood, with traces of gold leaf still visible in the indentations, were two capital letters. They read: "N-O."

Another, even more frantic, pull nearly brought down one half of the end of the stall, and left me so weak from physical effort and mental suspense, that I flopped down, heedless of the sharp-pointed rocks. But I had what I wanted, and now, with my brain reeling like a drunken man's, my hand shaking like the proverbial aspen leaf, I started to rub the caked-up mud and fungus from the sunken lettering on the board. It seemed then as if Fate had spared me for a purpose, and had given me this opportunity to make good my vow of long ago, for there before me were the letters "I-O-R-A." *IORANO*, that was the name.

This then must be the stolen yacht. Why should a vessel, built for a schooner, be rigged into a ketch? There could only be one reason—to disguise her so as to make identification more difficult at a distance. Why should this name plate be in the hold of a vessel so ridiculously altered? There was but one answer: This *was* the *IORANO*, whose rightful owner, a mere girl, had been marooned on the west coast of this very island, more than four years ago.

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For a long time I sat there, staring at the evidence of that cowardly crime as if it were a summons from Above—a summons to the only court we recognized—the court which meted out its justice only by the use of cold steel.

All the events of the past four years now flashed through my mind. There was that fight—my first fight for blood—on the same beach where Hall and I had embarked to board this vessel, only a few hours ago. There was the girl, the *Iorano's* owner, marooned, her providential appearance among us, her pitiful tale to Mac, and then my vow to avenge her. Ever since, I had felt that some day I would meet this Dundee Mike, the scoundrel who had marooned her. Could it be possible that my hopes were about to be realized? Who was the "red-headed" skipper of this ketch anyhow? Hall had said that the crew called him Mike—Mike who had tried to kill me—Mike and the *Iorano*! It was all too extraordinary to be mere coincidence.

As fast as my weakened condition would permit, I got up and hurried aft to the cabin. A fellow was sprawled out in one of the bunks—the mate of the ketch, sleeping off a hang-over after a night's debauchery. I shook him awake none too gently.

"Huh? What-cha want?" was the surly demand.

"Say! Who's Mike?"

"Aw, go t' Hell—Mike ain't here—he's gone t' Levuka."

"I know, but what's his other name?—Mike who?"

"Huh? Aw—Hell, it's Red Mike—Dundee Mike—he's a son-o'-a—— Go t' Hell away f'm me—I wanna sleep!"

I left him alone. I knew that Fate had plotted her course, and I started in search of Hall, to make sure that my cherished cutlass, with the brass hilt, was safe and sharp.

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A "small discharge" from a navy is not necessarily a reflection upon the character of its recipient. Good men have occasionally been framed by unscrupulous superiors, to satisfy some personal grudge. For many such men—good or bad—from the navies of all nations, the old South Seas often opened their havens of refuge. A man's past could be buried there, because few questions were asked, and true answers were seldom expected. The truth would only be doubted.

Many men went down in the mire. Few would ever rise again. According to their own whims, they could follow their own inclinations, to settle down to a life of trade or crime or gambling or loafing, as they chose.

Of all "small discharge" men who ever came to the South Seas, probably the least questioned—as to his past—was Dundee Mike. As to his integrity no questions were needed. Men with reasonably sound experience could judge him at their first meeting. Only one thing was known about his past—Mike had been an ensign in the Royal Navy. The cause for his discharge one simply assumed at first acquaintance. Among island navigators he had established a reputation for himself in a very few months after his arrival. The result was that even the most unscrupulous traders soon declared him tambo or tapu—depending upon whether they favoured the Melanesian or the Polynesian. The rule "Honour among thieves" never could be applied to him. He simply could not be on the square, and among men he soon found himself without friends.

He was usually successful, however, with women. They were an easy prey for him. Thanks to his early training, he was well able to assume the rôle of wolf in sheep's clothing, and thus he gained their confidence—invariably to their own detriment later on.

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Thus, when the owner of the schooner yacht *Iorano* had looked for a sailing master, the men along the Australian water-fronts were not so very much surprised when they learned that Dundee Mike had secured the berth. Still, it was nobody's business, and nobody cared. When the *Iorano* had gone on a cruise from which she never returned, traders simply had shrugged their shoulders. Some may have said, "I told you so."

Apparently everything had gone favorably for Mike. Instead of perishing, and thus possibly causing her eccentric aunt to become alarmed, the girl had returned to her home. Whatever her explanation as to the loss of her yacht might have been, she had not complained. She preferred to let Mike meet his fate at the hands of someone who would know how to deal with him. Thus the scoundrel had been left unscathed.

The crew of *Lascars* and Japanese had been soon discarded, one by one—only Mike knew how—and replaced by scoundrels of his own type, picked up on the Island.

With the vessel altered into a ketch, and her sides painted black instead of white, Mike had joined forces with Bully Hayes—bent on blackbirding and piracy—the occupation he was best suited for.

* * * * *

The *Ontong's* cargo profitably disposed of in Levuka—thanks to the able management of Bully Hayes who had not even bothered to change her name or appearance as questions of ownership were of little moment in Levuka—she returned to Rennell Island about six weeks after her seizure. This happened to be just two days after the former *Iorano* had come back from a short blackbirding trip.

The news of the *Ontong's* arrival spread like wildfire,

and even among the lowest of beach-combers there were great anticipations of prolonged sprees. It was learned that Bully Hayes had taken personal command of her, and everybody knew that he never returned without a good supply of the indispensable rum.

Dundee Mike, however, had brought back with him an ugly grouch. His coöperation with Bully Hayes was far from being inspired by friendship—a fact no doubt equally well understood by both of them, as well as by all of their associates.

Mike had looked upon the latest prize as his own legitimate property, and to be so unceremoniously deprived of her command was about the last straw for the test of his temper. Yet he feared Bully Hayes too much to defy him openly, and therefore, before very long, someone else, no matter who, would have to bear the brunt of his wrath.

He was looking for trouble, and was in the right place to find it now, but when it did come, it came from the least expected source.

Neither Hall nor I had left the Island since our first, not altogether willing appearance there. We were still using the old, abandoned, grass hut for our quarters. Hall had made up his mind that, whatever I might have at issue with Dundee Mike, it was partly his affair. He thought that it was all about the cowardly blow struck during the battle and insisting upon being on hand in case of trouble, he had refused to take part in the blackbirding expedition with the ketch. He preferred to remain with me while I recovered from my injury and regained my strength.

It would be impossible to describe my feelings on the night that brought the return of the *Ontong*. For more than a week, day after day, the men from that colony of vagabonds had been on the lookout, scanning the horizon

for her sails, and day after day I was living between hope of her return, and despair lest that miserable scoundrel, Mike, should have taken the chance of departing for cruising grounds of his own. The South Seas were large, and I had no idea that Bully Hayes would be on board to take charge.

Then, at last, came a night—it was about eleven—while Hall and I were sitting on the bluff, overlooking the bay, when we were startled by the sudden rattling of a cable chain, coming out of the darkness. That sound—it was like music to my ears—had hardly died away, when Hall confirmed my hopes with:

“I’ll bet that is the *Ontong*. I’ll bet my last bob on that.”

“Yes,” I said, feeling more weary than relieved from the long-continued suspense; “I hope you’re right, then tomorrow will be my day. Let’s turn in now.”

As we strolled toward our miserable shelter, I thought I heard him mumble:

“You’re making too damn much heavy weather of that affair. I don’t like it a bit.” But I was too busy with my thoughts to pay any more attention to him.

Sunrise, after that restless night of fitful sleep and horrible dreams, found me already on the beach. True enough, the craft which had gone to anchor out there was the *Ontong*. There was as yet no sign of life on board, so I sat down on a rock, watching the vessel as if, at any moment, I feared that she might fade from my sight.

“This, then,” I repeated over and over in my mind, “shall be my day, and”—I could not rid myself of the afterthought—“it may be my last.”

Presently—it must have been hours later—I began to see men moving about on board, but, as much as I strained my eyes, the one figure I looked for, the one I knew that I

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would recognize, although I had never seen him, was not among them.

"I suppose that scoundrel takes life too easy to get up so early." I calmed my nerves. Under no circumstances did I wish to show uncertainty to bring on outward signs of trepidation. More resolute than ever, I obeyed Hall's repeated summons to partake in the improvised breakfast which he was accustomed to prepare over an open fire outside of our hut.

Two men were standing at the schooner's rail, as we both paddled out to her in an old native canoe. I had never seen Bully Hayes before, but as we approached, it took but one fleeting glance at the burly, bearded one of the two to satisfy myself that now I was about to meet that most ruthless rover of the South Pacific, whose name was seldom mentioned without at least some awed respect or apprehension.

But it was not Bully Hayes who held my eye. Of him I only wondered how he would feel toward any stranger who should have the nerve to come on board to challenge his lieutenant. There might have been a dozen men at the rail by then, but I now saw only one, and the more I looked, the more I felt that this was to be the day of reckoning, no matter what the consequences might be. That man, standing beside his chief, needed no introduction to me—I could have picked him out of a hundred.

Tall—fully six feet four—lanky, red faced, with an ingrown sneer about his cruel mouth, he looked every inch the villain that he was, the type who would think of no one but himself. But it was not his protruding, smooth shaven jaw, nor his narrow set, small, gray eyes that marked him for me. There was no mistaking that scalp of close cropped, bright red hair that had earned him the cognomen of Red Mike.

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Thus far Hall had not spoken a word. His mind was possibly too occupied with the ill-forebodings which my mission must have invoked in him. With a searching glance at me, he saved me the trouble of making any unnecessary inquiries.

"There's your man," he said, nodding his head toward Dundee Mike, who with Bully Hayes seemed to be watching us intently. "How's he look to you now?"

I did not reply. I had no time for words just then; my mind held only one thought: "How will this thing start, and how will it end?" But I was resolved, and felt no fear.

We drew up alongside. I could see that Hall was nervous, but I knew that it was not out of fear for his own safety.

"Who's them bums?" a voice greeted us even before we had stopped paddling. I knew that it was Bully Hayes's voice. He had spoken to the man alongside of him, and his tone was not exactly friendly.

"Aw, them's the two stiff's that's left over from the scrap on this tub," came the other's slurring reply. "They should 'a been shark-bait by rights."

Bully Hayes laughed. It was not a pleasant laugh, and yet, as he looked at us appraisingly, there seemed to be a humorous twinkle in his eyes when he spoke.

"Hell, Mike," he chortled gleefully, "what's the sharks done to ye, that ye want to feed them such tough chow's that?"

Then to us: "Come aboard, ye swabs! What ye sittin' there for wid yer tongues in yer traps? Let's take a clost look at ye."

More than a dozen tough-looking customers had come to the rail, and as they recognized us as the survivors of that last raid, they greeted us with hearty cheers of welcome.

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In their own rowdy way the Bullies showed their appreciation for a fighter.

Bully Hayes looked interested. "Good material for recruits," he evidently thought, and then aloud at us, he repeated his invitation rather cheerily: "Come aboard, ye Bullies! The likes o' ye I got good use for! C'm on an' have a drink an' join us!"

But I had started out on the hunt for trouble—not quite so fast, I must admit—and evidently trouble was hunting for me, too, and had seen me first.

As we were reaching for the rail to swing ourselves on board, Hall, with good intentions, laid his hand on my arm, knowing only too well the true object of my mission.

"Don't start anything now," he cautioned, then evidently fearing that I would not heed him, he added more passionately: "For Christ's sake have sense—you'll have lots of chance to get at him!"

Dundee Mike seemed to have overheard the warning. He must have considered that cowardly blow he had struck me during the fight sufficient reason for a grievance—he could never have known about the other. As he shifted his gaze from Hall to me and back again, his eyes squinting with suspicion, I could not help thinking of that rowdy with the bush-knife on the beach here more than four years ago, and I was filled with the most profound hatred for the man. He seemed to have taken notice of that cutlass stuck in my belt, and he must have thought that it was there for a purpose—that it had something to do with himself. He was on the alert immediately.

"Start?" He almost grated the word, gripping the rail as if he was going to leap over it. "Start what? What y' gonna start. Who'd y' mean?"

He was evidently in a nasty mood—ready to pick trouble on only half a provocation.

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Hall groaned audibly. His good intention to sidetrack trouble had proved a flareback.

I had not expected hostilities to open like this, at least not as fast as this. I had intended to approach the matter quite differently—at least feel my way first, but Hall, in his anxiety to delay, had actually thrown down the gauntlet, before we had even stepped on board.

There was surprise on Bully Hayes's face. He knew that Dundee Mike did not have many friends, but why a perfect stranger should come out here to pick a fight with him, was more than he could understand. Mike had probably not told him about that blow he had struck me.

The surprise had come too suddenly. It had been only a matter of moments, but moments of suspense often establish destinies. I looked up into that brute's face, and thought that I read a challenge there as he had snarled his words at us. Both grievances I had against him seemed to stab at my brain at once. Before I could even think of what the consequences of rash words might be, I heard myself saying:

"It's you he means! You red-headed son of a—— It's you I came after, and it's you I'm going to make shark-bait of! All I want to know is—will you fight square?"

It seemed as if Fate had spoken for me—had taken possession of my reason. On my way out I had been turning over in my mind scheme after scheme of how to bring this thing to an issue. If it had not been for the physical occupation of paddling, my scheming would probably have worked me into a nervous state, but now there was no need of scheming any more. The gauntlet had been thrown down and picked up, and I felt relieved.

There was a moment of uncomfortable silence. Some of the men looked at Mike, others looked at me, questioning glances on all their faces. Mike was glaring at me as

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if he doubted my sanity. He seemed to be undecided whether to laugh or scowl. I looked from one to another seeking their approval or rebuke. Hall's face had turned a sickly colour. He could only foresee disaster. This sudden turn to what might have been a friendly reception had bewildered him.

Bully Hayes stood with his thumbs in his belt, his massive jaw thrust forward, nodding his head, as if to say:

"Now you've cooked your hash, go and eat it."

He was the first to find words, but they were words of surprise rather than reproach.

"What the Hell?" he burst out, half laughing, half scowling. "I'll be damned! What's this about anyway?"

That broke the spell. A roar of laughter and howls shot along the rail where every member of that rowdy crew had now assembled.

Mike seemed to be uncertain whether he was being ridiculed or cheered by his men. An ugly expression suddenly came over his face and he almost turned purple with rage. The uncalled-for insult had almost made him too angry for words.

"You—you—" he sputtered, losing all control of his tongue. Then with a sudden flash of rage his hand shot toward his holstered pistol.

Bully Hayes had caught the movement. Like a flash his right hand gripped the brawny's wrist and held it like a band of steel.

"None o' yer slinkin', Mike!" he thundered. "I don't know what it's about, but if there's accounts to square, you square'm man to man—like real Bullies!" Then at the others who were crowding nearer to the centre of hostilities: "Stand back there, y' swabs, give'm room!" Then at me: "Come aboard, ye divvil. If it's fight ye're lookin' for, let's see what y'are made of!"

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The rail was cleared in a moment, and as we vaulted over on to the deck, a loud cheer from the assembly greeted us. They hailed us because we were bringing them a treat which they had not anticipated, and incidentally Mike who was loved by none of them stood a chance of being slashed up a bit.

Bully Hayes seemed to be impartial. To witness a fight was always a welcome diversion for him, and he did not believe in wasting much time in preparations. He drew the gun from Mike's holster, and then whipping out his own, he brandished the two weapons threateningly.

"Boys, there's gonna be a squarin' 'tween two Bullies! Let th' best man win! If one o' ye——!"

He did not finish his threat. A tumultuous chorus, overjoyed with brutal anticipations, drowned his voice.

"Hip, Hip, Hell an' rum fer th' best man!" they roared. "What's it gonna be—knives er cheese-cutters?"

Hall was evidently afraid that this sudden turn of events might have confused me. He feared I might choose the wrong weapon. Alive to the menace of my adversary's superior reach, he shouted, regaining his nerve:

"Cutlass! My mate ain't got no knife."

Another wild cheer went up. Rock-hard hands started clapping Hall's back until he winced.

"That's the stuff!" the men howled like demons. "Give's somethin' good—get yer carver, Mike—c'm on, let's have ut!"

Bedlam had broken loose. Dundee Mike, with the look of a savage dog, stood with indecision as if contemplating the wisdom of springing at my throat. I was thankful that his gun had been taken from him. Bully Hayes, with a fiendish grin on his face, was shouting for order. Only after the most strenuous efforts did he succeed in making himself heard.

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"Hey, you!" he shouted at Hall, who was for the time the centre of the disturbance; "you ought to know the lay o' this tub. Get below an' fetch up some o' th' irons. Let Mike take his pick!"

The noise subsided suddenly as a one-eyed individual—they called him Slat—the toughest-looking one of the lot—held up his hand.

"Any bets, skipper?" he made himself heard, looking hopefully at his chief and then challenging his ship-mates.

"Yes, stake yer bets! Finish fight!" came the prompt decision as if the betting part was the main object of the coming clash.

Hall had disappeared below. Slat dove into a pocket of his tattered old jeans and dropped several gold sovereigns into his dirty cap. Shaking his headgear at arm's length, he challenged:

"Who's got money fer Mike? Mine's on th' Scrapper! Ten o' mine—c'm on now!"

A chorus of laughter was the reply. The name he had given me seemed to please those rowdies immensely. Then two other voices:

"Ten on Scrappy here! Who's holdin' Mike?" It was evident they intended to bait my antagonist as much as they could—evidence that he was not in their favour.

I felt disgusted. I had never intended to make sport of an issue which I had looked upon as a mission of justice, but it was too late to withdraw. Those ruffians were not going to be deprived of their amusement.

Bully Hayes started to empty his pockets. He was having the time of his life.

"Hell!" he howled with glee, "ain't there no Mike money? Y' can't all bet on one side—I'll take the bets meself." Then with a bully-ragging grin at Mike, he

added: "Th' divvil knows I been havin' a losin' streak f'r a month, but th' game's worth it."

There were more laughter and howls from the crew. It looked as if they welcomed the chance to make a butt of my opponent, and it was plain that they succeeded, for he restrained his temper only with the most heroic efforts.

Hall reappeared on deck, carrying four cutlasses and one old but sound naval officer's sword. He had chosen the weapons with discretion, not intending to let the gang imagine that he was trying to put my adversary at a disadvantage. The expression on his face, however, indicated that he did not relish this wanton gambling with human lives which the rowdies seemed to value so lightly.

Inwardly I felt inclined to curse Hall for the whole thing. I blamed his blundering words for it all, but now I was in for it. A Roman gladiator would have had a better chance to withdraw from the arena under the very noses of the emperor and his guests.

I withdrew my weapon from my belt. His jaw set in an ugly frown, Mike started to look over the blades which had been placed on the low cabin top. It seemed as if his hands were shaking slightly as he tested their edges and examined the firmness of the hilts. He was feeling the strain of being baited, and I took advantage of this by appearing as calm as possible under the circumstances.

"Any more bets?" came from the chief. "I got all I'll carry."

The men looked at each other undecided. They were keen to stake their money, but the betting seemed to go all one way. Apparently they were pre-judging the outcome of the fray by what they had seen of me during the fight with the Malays. Their choice of a favourite encouraged me quite a lot.

One lanky individual, not satisfied to let the horse-play

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end just yet, pulled some coins from his pocket and jingled them in his hand.

"Hey, Mike," he joshed with a grimace; "c'm on, carry yer own stake. What say?"

He was rewarded with howls and cat-calls.

"How the Hell can a dead man pay a bet?" several mocked in chorus.

Mike was fairly fuming, but he kept on with his inspection of the weapons.

"I got enough o' this!" he growled, testing the swing and balance of the officer's sword. "I'll settle wid some o' ye swabs after!"

"Then ye'll settle in Hell!" came the jeering chorus.

Bully Hayes laughed uproariously. Mike straightened up with the officer's sword in his grasp, looking at his chief menacingly.

"All right!" he snarled between clenched teeth. "I'm ready. This is mine."

Another chorus of howls and boos greeted him. The blade he had selected was fully eight inches longer than mine. Added to his longer reach it gave him considerable advantage. His unfairness only had the effect of steeling my determination to bring this affair to a finish without quarter.

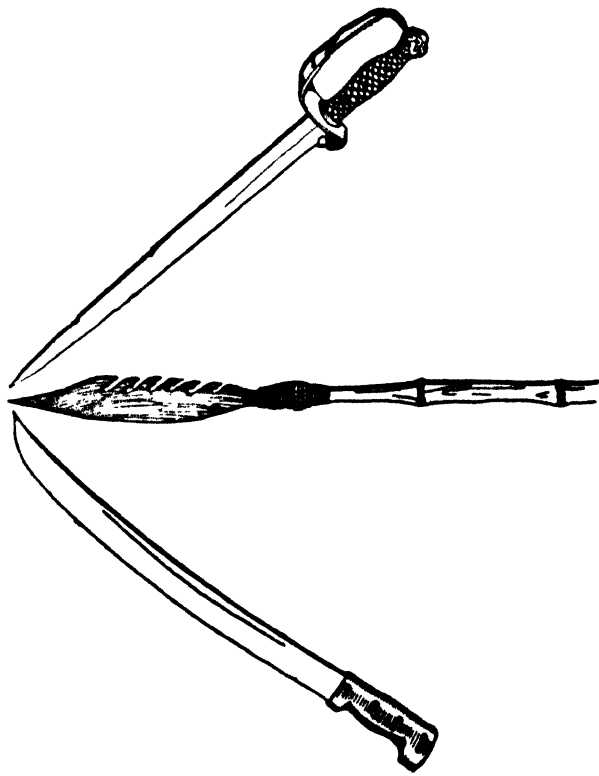
But the bystanders were not satisfied. They certainly did not love this rowdy among rowdies.

"Aw, take a pike-hook, Mike, an' y'll be able t' reach 'im better," one of them jeered.

Mike's frown was getting uglier. He was awaiting the word to start.

"Go for'ard an' get a handspoke!" disgustedly came from another.

The gleam in Mike's eyes was like that of a panther about to spring. He assumed a crouching posture, his



A Bush-Knife, a Native Ironwood Spear and a Cutlass. The Weapon at the Right was used by the Author in his Encounter with Dundee Mike.

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sword on guard, and glowered at me—watching to catch me off guard.

I sized him up and held my blade carelessly in front of me, leading him to believe that I was not ready. I wanted him to make the attack.

One more jest at his expense. It was Slats who could not control his tongue:

“I’ll hold him fer ye, Mike!”

With a bellow of rage, the Bully leaped for me, making a most vicious slash for my neck.

I could have parried that wild swing and disarmed him, all with one movement. His was a most clumsy lead. But I did not want the combat to end just then. One of us had to go, that was certain, and I wanted to give my senses time to get benumbed so that, at the end, I would not be inclined to regard this beast as human.

Instead of parrying I simply ducked and the force of the swing spun the man clean around. Then I closed in on him to rob him of the advantage of his superior reach.

The spectators were now treated to the exhibition they had been looking forward to. My fighting blood had come to the surface and I forgot to think of the result.

But my antagonist proved no easy victim. It took sword-play to match him at his game. I was kept busy closing in on him. Well aware of his superior reach, he kept constantly retreating, but every one of his rear passes was met by a front pass from me.

The clashing of our heavy blades could be heard in shore, as could be judged by the crowd of beach-combers gathered there.

Highs and lows, rights and lefts, head lunges and *secondes*, intermingled with straight thrusts for heart or

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throat, were exchanged and successfully parried. This was obviously to be the last fight for one of us.

Our perspiration was running down in streams, but we were heedless of this discomfort as well as of our ebbing strength. Neither of us was as yet bleeding.

Mike's wind seemed to give out; his slashes were coming with less vigour. Finally, as I closed in on him once more, he struck at my face with the heavy pommel of his sword.

My cutlass caught him across the wrist, point toward his heart, and as his weapon clattered to the deck, I lunged forward, and Dundee Mike collapsed in a heap. The double edged blade had pierced his heart.

I never knew whether he had heard my words:

"This for the *Iorano*!"

Whether or not the others heard those words above their rousing cheers, they could not have known what that message was meant to convey. *Iorano* means greetings.

Mike may have thought the greeting came from another world.

CHAPTER XVIII

BLACKBIRDING

IT has often been remarked that the devil is not as black as he is painted, which saying, of course, is meant to infer that His Satanic Majesty may be possessed of a few qualities which are really to his credit.

This rule of course applies also to men. Thus one often finds, after getting into intimate association with individuals of evil reputation, that they often possess amiable traits which go a long way toward offsetting their many faults.

That was exactly the type of man I found Bully Hayes to be. He had realized for some time that Dundee Mike was yellow clean through and for that reason he did not seem to bemoan his lieutenant's sudden departure. Bully Hayes was unquestionably a pirate, but he was not yellow. After getting well acquainted with him I felt inclined to attribute his rumoured coöperation with Malay pirates to mere coincidence. He himself obviously had sufficient courage to tackle any formidable prospect entirely on his own. If the episode of the *Ontong* had been a carefully engineered scheme, I preferred to credit Dundee Mike with the planning of it all, that scoundrel was so entirely capable of planning anything of that sort as long as his own miserable hide was safe. But why denounce him any more? Did he not pay the just penalty for his crimes?

That Bully Hayes was a blackbirder may be held against

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him. But wait. When I was a boy I once met the captain of a New Bedford whaler, one of Captain McPurden's friends, a man of his own type, a fearless open-hearted sea rover, a man of honour. He told me that many of the owners of some of the old time New England slavers were pillars of the church, and were well aware of the trade their vessels were engaged in. And yet those very men would have had Bully Hayes hanged—possibly to hide their own family skeletons.

We used to do our "recruiting"—obtain labour for those who were operating plantations or mines—on islands where it was a case of dog eat dog—on Malaita, on Buka, on Maramasiki, Ulaua, Fauro and even on Papua—but we did not employ Van Asvelt's methods. Our victims always had a fighting chance, and we took desperate risks every time we had dealings with them. Not once, during my years with Bully Hayes did we ever attack the natives. They were invariably ready to attack us even before our anchor touched bottom, intent upon robbing, killing and eating us, and to preserve our mummified heads as trophies of victory.

Then there would be a furious battle, and sometimes there would be prisoners—trophies of *our* victory.

Then again there were times when the chiefs or even the devil-devil doctors, in order to save themselves from the white man's wrath after an unsuccessful raid, would agree—upon our demand, of course—to let some of the tribesmen go into servitude. If those unfortunates never returned to their island it was probably the fault of those who "employed" them. But in any of those raids, let but one of our men go down, and let the savages know that a spear or arrow of theirs had done it, and their respect for the white man's weapons would be gone.

But the less said about our blackbirding expeditions the

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better. At least we were not guilty of more cruelty than the savages. And how about those governments which under pretense of law and order and in the interest of civilization, have subjected entire races to slavery without even giving them a fighting chance against long range guns and explosive shells, hurled from a safe distance into their villages?

Despite my disgust with the blackbirding trade, I stuck to it. I resolved that every trip was to be my last, but somehow, upon the return, there was always one more—just one more trip to accumulate a sufficient fund to start a trading vessel of my own. Then I would see to it that the *Iorano* went back to her rightful owner. I am afraid my willingness to delay was a sign of a poorly exercised conscience.

However, Fate again took a hand before it was too late.

I had gone to Sydney on a "cashing-in" trip—had made the journey with Oliver's schooner *Fulualea* (Oliver at times coöperated with us), and there—the very last occurrence I could possibly have anticipated—I met Cathryn. At sight of her I felt keenly conscious of my guilt, and I would not have had the courage to face her had she not seen me before I had a chance to evade her.

She knew of my connection with Bully Hayes. Through the mysterious channels of communication in the South Seas, she had heard of my fray with Dundee Mike. Even so, she spared my feelings by only casually referring to it, and thus shamed me more than if she had openly accused me of the precarious trade I was then engaged in.

I tried to approach the subject of the *Iorano*, but Cathryn cut me short, implored me never to mention the vessel's name to her again. She only hoped that the disgraced little craft would come to an early end, and her words of that morning in Sydney appeared before my eyes

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like handwriting upon the wall—like a warning written in blood.

"The Islands, they make men, and they make beasts, but I'm sure you will be one of the exceptions."

I received much news from Cathryn, news because I had been out of touch with my old friends for so long, but the greatest surprise of all, a pleasant one, was the information that she was now the bride of Captain McPurden. They had been married about six months previously.

The Captain had returned to the South Pacific after only a short stay in Nova Scotia. Divorce had ended the unhappy ties which had drawn him away from Cathryn three years before this meeting of ours.

The old *Emma P.* was gone. She had been sent on a prospecting trip in charge of a sailing master who had wrecked her on a coral reef near the Island of Moala in the Koro Sea, and Mac had now gone there to see what could be salvaged of the wreck. The shock had been so severe to her that Cathryn had not trusted herself to go along, for she loved the old bark as she loved her Captain.

That was the turning point. I determined to quit Bully Hayes. On my return to Rennell Island, an opportunity presented itself which so strengthened my resolution that at last it developed into reality.

One night, near the shore of Rennell Island a yacht had anchored; a beautiful sailing yacht, larger than either the *Ontong* or the *Iorano*. She was a full-rigged brig and carried a large crew, but had they known of that band, to whom human life meant so little, who used to frequent that very beach, I doubt whether they would have risked lingering near that shore.

Bully Hayes was drunk on board of the *Ontong*, and the schooner was hauled up on the beach. That old vessel, with most of her copper sheathing ripped off from contact

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with coral snags, her bottom planking honey-combed by the teredo and leaking like a basket, was undergoing extensive repairs, mostly by unskilled hands. It looked as if she would be out of commission for more than two months.

The Bullies, in the face of all this hard non-paying work, were all in an ugly mood. The supply of rum, under the circumstances tapped to capacity, threatened to become exhausted before the job could be half finished. What then?

After a day of overabundant indulgence, someone suggested that the brig might make a good blackbirder—someone else remarked that dead men tell no tales.

I do not know whether Bully Hayes, if sober, would have agreed to the plot, but as he was now, he did. He requested me to get on board the yacht under some pretext and ascertain to what extent they would be prepared to offer resistance.

That was the last straw. If the assembly of guests and crew on the yacht were not inclined to take seriously my warning to leave the Island as fast as they could, they had plenty of opportunity, before the night was over, to make up their minds that that part of the South Pacific was not a healthy place for yachting, for they were practically unarmed.

It would have been folly to expect those drunken ruffians, who were awaiting my report, to spare the yacht because there were several women in the party. It would have made them only so much the more anxious to attack and seize the vessel. Therefore, with the hope of bringing them to reason, I came back with tales of armament I had seen—mitrailleuses and light artillery—enough to repel an army.

That lie saved the lives of those on board—lives the

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loss of which some one would have mourned—but it cost the lives of most of the plotters—lives hopelessly lost long ago.

Our band split into two factions. Some, the majority, drunker than the rest—including Bully Hayes—were for attacking the vessel at all hazards. Others, the minority—a little more discreet—sided with me.

Then came a night of terror. Those on the yacht as they looked toward the beach had a chance, in the distorting, flickering light of our bonfires, to get at least an impression of the ugliest bloodiest drunken brawl ever fought.

This band, once turned loose upon itself, knew no limits. Many an old score, suddenly flashing into drink-crazed minds like smoldering embers fanned into flame, was now settled. The hoarse shouting of profane voices, the clashing of bush-knives and old cutlasses, the shrieking of startled birds, all were like the hideous impressions of a bedlamite's nightmare.

Nearly all night long this racket lasted. In the morning there were hardly a score of tattered, bleeding survivors, and the brig-rigged yacht—the cause for all this bloodshed—was gone.

Those on board of her never knew that in that bloody fight one side fought in their defense—although the defenders were not aware of that themselves.

* * * * *

Three days later a sorry-looking remnant of the Bullies, under their disgusted chief, Bully Hayes, left Rennell Island on board of the all but worm-eaten *Iorano*, after setting fire to what was left of the *Ontong*. And when we finally abandoned the badly leaking little ketch on a lonely beach on Thursday Island, even that last handful of the notorious band was soon scattered to the four winds.

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Possibly, if the majority of that remnant had known that their two remaining chiefs wore belts which concealed sufficient funds to replace the abandoned vessels many times over, neither Bully Hayes nor I would have ever set foot on land to search for new opportunities of trading.

There was one of their number to whom I clung as a companion. That was Hall, once the supercargo of the *Ontong*. Although he had been severely cut up during the brawl on the Island, he survived, and I intended to grubstake him on our way back to Australia to give him a new chance in life.

Bully Hayes and I parted as friends, our differences of that night of brawling forgotten—each of us wending his own way.

CHAPTER XIX

I BECOME MASTER OF THE *GLENORA*

OPPORTUNITY knocked on my door after about a month of fruitless searching, and again it came from what I now considered my lucky port—Sydney.

There, for nearly three years, shunned by traders on account of their boundless superstition, had lain a ship after my own heart. It was the barkentine *Glenora*. Massively built of teak and Tasmanian eucalyptus, beautifully lined, broad of beam, of nearly five-hundred tons register, she was the ideal vessel for trading.

They had named her "*Glenora*, the unfortunate," because her first three masters had mysteriously disappeared in as many years, and until I acquired ownership—for a mere trifle, as ships are valued—there was no one who cared to take a chance with her.

There was a good deal of doubtful head-shaking, and many wise predictions had me on the vessel's death list before the end of the first trip, but I paid no attention to them—I had a ship of my own. Not altogether devoid of superstition myself, I believed that ships had souls, and that I had won her soul because I loved the vessel the minute my foot touched her deck; besides that, it had been little red-headed, freckle-faced Cockney, whom I had picked up in Melbourne, who had put me on her trail. Possibly Cockney received a commission from the last owners for ridding them of that white elephant. I hope he did.

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Cockney became my Second Mate. He would have been the First, but Cockney's brain could never absorb the scientific part of navigation.

At last I was master of my own little world, but trading was not what it used to be. The rich deposits of pearl shell, where a fortune used to be picked up in jig time, were getting fairly well exhausted. Trading companies were beginning to spring up, and were granted concessions by various governments, and we free-lancers were warned to keep off the roads that we ourselves had opened. Looked upon as poachers, we were time and time again forced to prospect for new grounds.

Trip after trip the *Glenora* made, but none of them were to be compared with that memorable trip of the *Emma P.* whose ancient timbers were now being devoured by the teredo on the reefs of Moala in the Koro Sea. (Thank God, she has never been disgraced by service as a tow-barge!)

But two of the *Glenora's* voyages were not prospecting trips. Twice, in defiance of the companies who had cornered all the trade goods in the coast ports, she set sail for San Francisco—able to carry a good burden—and returned, loaded to capacity, with the goods that were needed. Like a redeeming angel for the few free-lancers that were left—nevertheless the end of the happy old days was in sight.

There came a trip to Gaua, one of the Banks Islands—a bad island. That trip was an utter failure, but the most severe shock was the death of Cockney. That gallant little fighter lost his life through a spear-thrust during a fight with the hostile natives, and after that neither arms nor diplomacy would persuade the savages to listen to reason.

The *Glenora* set sail for Levuka with her cargo of trade goods untouched.

I BECOME MASTER OF THE *GLENORA*

It was at Levuka on the Island of Ovalau—once dubbed with the presumptuous title of Capital of the Fiji Islands—that fortune smiled once more.

The trip to Gaua had convinced Mr. Gristow, my First Mate, that there was a hoodoo on the *Glenora*. He was going to quit and buy the schooner *Fulualea* which Oliver was offering for sale in Levuka.

Ole Jorgensen, my new First Mate, and I were returning from an inspection of the schooner. It was a hot, murky day, and we settled ourselves in a pair of rickety old wicker chairs on the dilapidated veranda of Eugene's establishment, for a refreshing drink of lukewarm whiskey and soda.

Suddenly I felt a heavy hand on my shoulder, and as I turned my head, a voice boomed in my ears.

"Hello, boy!" That voice took me back to the days when I had not had a care in the world. In my mind's eye I saw a large hall crowded to capacity by an hilarious rough and ready crowd of old time deep water sailors.

I knew that voice, yes, and I knew the touch of that hand. Like a shot I was on my feet, upsetting Eugene's tottering old table and driving that half breed into despair by breaking two of his best glasses that "have come away along far distant France."

But what did I care about all the glasses "along far distant France?" What did I care about all the tufts of raven hair the frantic Tahitian extracted from his abundant crop? Before me, looking not a day older than on that fateful day twelve years ago in Sydney, stood old Mac. But my joy was not to end there. At his side, her colour only a shade nearer to the island tan—a slight shade that made her look more beautiful than ever—stood Cathryn.

Possibly, to make this pleasant and most unexpected

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meeting sufficiently striking to fit the occasion, I should have stood staring in speechless astonishment. But I was suddenly possessed by a feeling that it was perfectly logical to find them here. No reason—yet that was the way I felt.

I simply reached out, gripping both their hands at once.

"Hello, spooners," was all I could think of saying; "I'll take you on board whether you like it or not, and have you for dinner."

Cathryn's eyes were fairly sparkling with delight. She was quick as ever.

"Not à la Ugu, I hope," she retorted mischievously, and then we all roared, while Eugene continued to bewail his glasses that "have come away along far distant France."

That night, in my cabin, it seemed as if the clock had been set back about ten years. True enough, most of the old friends were missing, never to join in revelry again; nevertheless the party was in the nature of a reunion. My dinner table was graced by Cathryn and Mac, and although Ole was a newcomer, he seemed to fit in well among the old-timers.

In our conversation we again lived in the old days. We talked of Mr. Kennedy who had been lost at sea, no one knew where, of Mr. Guerne who had married a wealthy widow in New Zealand and settled down to a life of peace and comfort; of Bunk and Cockney, both buried at sea far away among the Banks Islands, and about the old *Emma P.* whose rapidly disintegrating bones had drawn the happy couple to the Koro Sea for one more last look before the old bark should disappear forever.

We talked of our trips—that wonderful trip which had made Cathryn one of us; and finally of that disheartening trip when we left the Solomons in sheer disgust.

"That was Hell," Mac said meditatively. "We started

out on a wild goose chase. Then, as if that wasn't enough, we went right off on another on a hint dropped by a delirious stiff. I don't believe there was anything there worth the powder we used shooting niggers all night."

"I don't know," I argued, "I'm not quite convinced just yet, it seems to me it won't do any harm to try that place. Things have been going rotten of late, and I feel like taking a desperate chance."

I had been speaking to Mac, but a single glance at Cathryn compelled me to keep my gaze fastened upon her. As she sat there listening, staring at me with unseeing eyes from across the table, I saw her in memory seated on the taffrail of the *Emma P.*, staring into vacancy, while that wonderful brain of hers developed the scheme of convincing the devil-devil doctors of Guadalcanar that their days of feasting must end.

"Yes," she said slowly, without giving Mac a chance to oppose me—and her voice seemed to be the voice of twelve years ago—"you should not let that go by the board. I feel certain the man spoke the truth."

Mac, seated beside her, looked at me as if about to say: "Maybe we blundered, at that." But instead he only said: "Well, the oracle has spoken."

"Yes," I replied, thinking hard, "I'm beginning to believe that my next trip is to be a prospecting one——"

"To Bougainville?" he broke in. "How about Koho? D'you think you could handle him now?"

I was not exactly certain as to how to reply to this, but again Cathryn took the lead.

"Why not try in spite of Koho?" she said almost coaxingly, then with her mind apparently wandering again "Koho! He must be bad by the way you men seem to respect him, but why cross the bridge before we reach it?"

Mac uttered a little laugh.

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"We?" He echoed the word as if to correct her speech. "What d'you mean by we?"

"She means," I put in hastily, clutching at the chance that my interpretation of her meaning might be accepted, "that you both are going to make the trip with me."

"But, my dear—" Mac tried to start to reason with her, but I would not let him go any further. Waving my hands in front of him as if trying to push back the rest of his words, I took it for granted that Cathryn would prove a willing accomplice.

"Mac," I shouted, all of my old-time hilarity returning—albeit that was the first time I addressed him in that familiar fashion—"you're overruled. You old pirate, you had me shanghaied on your ship—now consider yourself shanghaied on mine. Get your duds on board—that's more than you'd let me do—and be damn quick about it—that's orders!"

Mac looked from one to the other of us, his eyes as big as saucers and his cheeks puffed out, an expression on his face as if he thought he had just discovered a carefully laid plot. He seemed to make several attempts at speech, but appeared to be at a loss for words.

"Say!" he at last exploded shaking with mirth. "Is this some kind of a game you two been putting up on me?" Then, almost breaking my fine teak-wood table with his huge fist, he threw himself back in his chair in utter resignation. "But I don't give a damn," he chortled; "we're off for Bougainville! Hip, hip!"

We joined him in his cheering until Chin, my Chinese cook, stuck his mummified head through the door and in mock alarm demanded:

"Walle matta? Hell bloke loose?"

Chin's face, once upon a time racially typical as to colour, had through age and his years of life in the torrid

zone turned a greenish gray, which, with his beady, sunken eyes and his parchment-like dried-up features, would have enabled him to substitute for a cherished relic in an Egyptian museum. His cue, which was now coiled like a rope on top of his head, had long since lost its ebony lustre, and resembled a piece of weather-beaten manila junk. He presented a picture not to be passed unnoticed.

At sight of him, Mac—the same old Mac as ever—gave a howl like a Buka bush-raider.

"Get out o' here, you yellow-bellied Mongolian," he yelled, full of glee, "or I'll feed you to Koho."

Such threats meant nothing to Chin. He simply grinned his most Mongolian grin, preparatory to replying.

When Chin indulged in that amiable expression, the slits on both sides of his flattened nose which served him as eyes, closed completely. It was said that he used to shut his eyes when indulging in a smile for fear that he might accidentally see his face in a mirror, an encounter that would probably have frightened him out of his wits. All those who had seen Chin smile agreed that the most ferocious faces of Dyak pirates or Solomon Island savages were hardly a bit more blood-chilling.

"Him nigge' felle' him no eat China felle'," he condescended to enlighten Mac. "Him fathe' fo' Koho him say China felle' tough meat, no good fo' eat."

Mac looked at me as if to ask whether I was running a floating dime museum, which in that part of the world, of course, would have been a half-bob show. Then he looked at Chin and swore at him.

"What the Hell do you know about Koho, you third cousin of Satan's grandmother?" he demanded with no little interest. "Where'd you get all that chow from?"

Chin, now suddenly grown serious, extracted his long, sinewy body from behind the door.

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"Long time back me stop along Bougainville," (actually he called the Island Nee Gibby), "fo' catchum sandal-wood on China ship. Him felle' Koho he catchum fi' China felle'—wantum fo' eat. Fathe' fo' Koho, him chief, he say China felle' no good eat, Koho say takum head anyhow. Koho an' him fathe' fight, an' Koho kill him fathe'. Othe' nigge' felle' come f'om bush an' lot mo' fight, an' China felle' get away, no lose him head."

In pleasant recollection of his providential escape from the most savage man-eaters of the Solomons, Chin again distorted his features in a diabolic grin, while Mac stared at him with pronounced interest.

"So," he said at length, "you have been up against Koho yourself, eh? Maybe you know a little about his way of entertaining his visitors. Did you ever hear that he breaks all the bones of his prisoners a couple of days before he kills them to make their meat soft?"

Cathryn really had the thrilled look of a child on its way to a circus.

"This is getting more interesting every minute!" she exclaimed with enthusiasm, though fully aware that Mac had told the truth. "We simply must go and see him."

Chin again indulged in a heart-constricting grin.

"That so," he nodded eagerly. "Koho spoilum all bone, then he stickum in wate', tlee, fo', fi' day—makum soft, good fo' eat."

At this, Ole snorted with disgust. Thus far he had been only an interested listener, but now he could not restrain himself any longer.

"Say," he shot at our entertainer, "don't stop right in the middle of it. I'd like to know a little more about what I've got to look forward to. Y'see when I'm invited for dinner at the royal palace I'd like to know what I'm eating."

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Mac beamed upon the mate with a genial smile. I was pleased to note his liking for the man whom he seemed to have accepted as one of our rank.

"Well, Mr. Jorgensen," he volunteered with mock assurance, "of course, you understand that, when you have dinner with Koho, you'll be his dinner, so he'll really be your guest, unless he should invite you to partake of one of his numerous wedding feasts, in which case you'll have a chance to see whether mothers-in-law are actually as tough as they're made out to be. He eats his new mother-in-law every time he takes a new wife. That ought to be something to look forward to."

That gruesome sally having brought down the house, Mac looked up at the cabin clock and said amid the laughter:

"Hell! we could sit here all night talking about that devil." Then to Cathryn: "Come on little girl, let's get ready. It's well enough to roast Koho on our way to see him—after that he may roast us." His face suddenly grew serious. "It's all right to joke about this thing," he added, "but when it comes to the hands, don't let them know where we're going or there will be mutiny on board—if they're familiar with Koho's reputation."

We were in the right port to experience no difficulty in picking up a fairly large crew of beach-combers who had sufficient nerve to embark upon a trip of unknown destination. Thus, four days later, with Mac's able assistance, we were on our way. Once more the old times seemed to have returned.

CHAPTER XX

MULFY

EIGHT days of moderate sailing, enlivened into occasional spurts by squalls of varying duration, brought us to the entrance of the dangerous waters to the west of Vella Lavella. Even if one adds an unavoidable delay of two days in Makira Bay on the south-west coast of San Christobal, on account of persisting calms, our journey of fifteen hundred miles was made in very reasonable time—auxiliary motors being still in the future in the early eighties. With good luck we stood a chance, within the next twenty-four hours, to pick out the anchorage which several years previously the *Emma P.* had left in disgust. We were now approaching our destination with confidence, once more guided by the intuition of a remarkable woman.

Most of our waking hours of those ten days had been spent in suggesting, considering and condemning scheme after scheme designed to bring the most savage of cannibal chiefs to reason, so that he would not interfere with our expedition. We had not yet worked out, however, any practical solution of the problem.

The strain of all this mental exertion, on which the whole success of the trip depended, was beginning to tell on my nerves. We were now slowly drifting to the westward under reduced canvas, awaiting daylight before attempting to negotiate the tedious passage between Fauro and Shortland Island, but I found it impossible to fol-

low the example of all save the watch on deck, and indulge in a much needed rest.

Throughout the night and midnight watches I paced the deck. Even when the bright rays of the moon sharply outlined the high peaks of Naravo and Norongo with a silvery border, I had no eye for that beautiful panorama. All I could do was to scheme and scheme, hoping that Fate would be kind enough to bring on some favourable contingency.

Eight bells on the shift to the morning watch came at last. Soon it would be daylight and at least we could proceed on our course. Both mates remained on deck with me and the three of us stood near the wheel box, straining our eyes to the westward, debating whether the high land now looming above the western horizon, could be Mono Island.

Just before the first rays of the morning sun gilded the top of the promontory, my two guests appeared from the companionway, and coming aft arm in arm, joined the party.

"Well, I had to rob this lady of her beauty sleep this morning," Mac said, after the customary greeting. "I thought we'd be about getting close to Mono and I wanted her to see it. Well, there it is right over the port bow.

"Some romancing fellow's named it Treasure Island. He must have seen it same's we're going to see it this morning. Just watch it when the sun first hits it and you'll know the reason why. As to real treasure being buried there—well, I never heard of anyone looking for it, or, much less, finding any."

A wondrous sight was to be revealed to us then. But who save a prophet could have foreseen that it was to establish the destiny which would lead to the success of our expedition.

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Cathryn, clinging to Mac's arm, was so enwrapped by the sight of nature's magnificent display of colour that she did not utter a word. She seemed to be in a waking dream.

All our eyes were fastened upon the distant land which, with the approaching dawn, gradually turned from a silvery gray to a velvety purple; then, as the soft velvet seemed to change, as it were, to sparkling silk, it took on a blood red hue, every jagged peak sharply defined against the background of gray sky. And finally, struck by the first direct rays of the rising sun, behind us, it assumed a glistening orange tone, its top reflecting the light in brilliant golden splendour. The whole island now looked like a mountain of gold rising from the azure sea.

Mr. Beck, the Second Mate, was the first to bring us back to earth.

"By the Lord, it does make a fellow feel like helping himself. It sure looks like treasure aplenty."

"Well, swim in shore and help yourself; you can have my share of it," Mr. Jorgensen spoke up. "Damned little stock I take in all the stories about buried treasure."

The fascinating sight before us had vanished. Mono Island now looked like any of the many other islands.

"That's the way I feel about them stories, too," Captain Mac chuckled, just as I was about to give my orders to the mates. "Still I've heard some pretty stiff-necked old cusses insist that there's buried treasure on—well, where we're going."

He checked himself before mentioning the name of the Island, as his last words had been spoken rather loud, within hearing distance of the man at the wheel. This fellow happened to be a rather wild-looking young reprobate known to us as Mulfy. Once upon a time, before his disinheritance by a stern parent, he had been Mr.

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Mulford Cunningham. We had picked him up in Levuka among other flotsam and jetsam at Eugene's. During his palmy days, Mulfy had been an enthusiastic yachtsman—at least, that was his story, and he proved there was some truth to it by making a fairly efficient helmsman. Thus it happened that Mulfy was at the wheel and overheard the mention of buried treasure somewhere where we were going. That he had heard it, I had good reason to assume a few days later, when Mulfy came within a hair's breadth of playing the leading rôle in a drama entitled "Long Pig."

There was no further opportunity now, however, to discuss buried treasure. It was time to veer ship. With the wind on our starboard quarter, we headed for the dangerous waters to the East of Fauro.

* * * * *

"It's a damn nasty looking shore, 'cause by moonlight it looks so damn quiet that it gives you the creeps."

Those were Ole Jorgensen's words as he came aft after paying thirteen fathoms of cable chain through the hawse-pipe.

"Lord, what an unhealthy sound the echo of our chain-rattle brought out from the shore," he relieved himself further, wiping the sweat from his brow. "If this was my ship, I'd carry a rope anchor like the Gloucester fishermen, so's we could sneak in quietly. Hell, with all the racket we made—why it looks as if there ain't a nigger on the Island."

It was about ten o'clock at night. We had drifted to our anchorage with the tail end of a mere breath of wind, after sounding our way through the uncharted passage throughout the entire day. The swashing of the breaking swell, in this quiet cove, could be heard, on what little beach there was in front of the jungle less

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than a quarter of a mile away, but there was not the slightest sign of life, not even the occasional squeal of a pig.

Cathryn and Mac were reclining in canvas chairs on the quarter-deck, and Mac had heard Ole's last comment. His years of experience in island waters made him more than a mere guest; his welcome advice could always be relied upon.

"Don't fool yourself with rope anchor ideas, Mr. Jorgensen," he retorted. "The niggers have been watching every move we've made the whole afternoon. I'm willing to bet they knew our anchorage more than two hours ago.

"That Koho is a fox. He remembers the licking we gave him when we were here before, but, of course, he can't know that some of this crew were there at that time. This ship looks big enough to him to leave alone. He'd rather lure us in shore by making us believe the Island is uninhabited. You won't see a single nigger all day tomorrow."

I asserted my rights as master.

"Nevertheless," I ordered Hall, who was now my supercargo, "you see to it that all the gear in the lazaret is good and handy for emergency." Then, addressing Mr. Beck who was on the main deck to see that all the running gear was coiled out of the way, I said: "We'll have three men on each anchor watch through the night. The first thing in the morning have the big tub hung over the side. It needs swelling out."

With that order I turned in, tired out after the restless night and perfectly willing to trust to chance for the solution of the problem of dealing with Koho.

Little did I foresee that the tub was to be a determining factor in that solution. Who would have thought that a cedar tub, four feet in diameter by three feet deep,

used only for washing shells before stowing, could become so important to all of us?

As soon as I had finished my breakfast I went on deck with a telescope to join the First Mate who, with his glass to his eye, was already scanning the hills beyond the jungle, in a futile attempt to discover some sign of habitation. As far as the eye could discern, despite our high power lenses, the Island might have been deserted. There was not even the faintest suggestion of a column of smoke to betray the location of a village.

Far inland, the mountain ranges, capped here and there by crater-like peaks, were blending out of vision with the bluish haze of space. Sloping down apparently from a height of several hundred feet above the foot of the mountains to almost the very edge of the wave-washed rocks along the narrow strip of white beach, there seemed to be nothing but an unbroken mass of jungle. Almost directly shoreward from our anchorage the mouth of a small river or creek could be seen, which, with the exception of a partly cleared, low promontory to the west of the river's mouth, and a projecting wooded point at the east bank, seemed to form the only break in that wall of impenetrable-looking thicket. It was an ideal shore as a lurking place for wily savages bent on ambushing any unsuspecting party ill enough advised to risk a landing.

We were soon joined by the whole quarter-deck staff, including our guests, all of them anxious to have a peek at this shore, which for years had been shrouded in so much mystery. If ever I had the idea in my head that the quarter-deck of any ship was sacred ground—well, then I should never have been master of a South Sea trader. Men who worked on a commission basis could not be dogged around quite as much as men who worked for wages. Therefore they were apt to be left to do as they

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pleased—as long as they did not overstep the limit.

If there is any sane-minded skipper who would consider it a serious breach of discipline if three of his crew deliberately took it upon themselves to polish brass work, whether it needed it or not—I must confess that mine needed it rather badly—then I would sincerely recommend a padded cell for that skipper's domicile. The only serious drawback such voluntary brass polishing might have had on board of a South Sea trader was that the skipper, upon beholding it, might have dropped dead from heart failure.

Mr. Beck must have considered my heart capable of withstanding a pretty severe jolt, otherwise he would have kept his latest discovery severely to himself; he might have even interfered with the scouring industry before it had proved fatal to me. Under the circumstances he did not; he merely tapped me on the shoulder to draw my attention.

"Look a' that; will you?" he said in an awed whisper, as if afraid that loud speech might spoil the effect of the surprise he had in store for me.

I looked in the direction whither he was pointing, and there—I could hardly believe my eyes—less than ten feet away from us—were Mulfy and two of his pals, industriously scrubbing away on the pea-green verdigris of the brass hub cap and the rim bands of the pilot wheel.

We all looked—more or less dumbfounded, I believe—until Mac relieved the tension of the moment with:

"Well, I'll be damned!"

Woman's vanity had to assert itself. Cathryn was the next to speak.

"That's what the influence of a lady's presence does for you. Those boys are gentlemen. Please don't interfere with them."

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Mulfy heard her, and shot her a grateful look without stopping at his task. Mr. Beck immediately grew apologetic.

"Oh, I ain't goin' to stop them," he said defensively. "But what strikes me 's what got into them fellows all of a sudden. Why, this mornin' early, when I wanted to hang the tub overboard, the same three bums fell all over themselves lending a hand. I've never seen such willin' cusses."

"They're trying to work themselves into a cabin berth, poor devils!" was Captain Mac's sympathetic verdict, and with that we forgot about Mulfy, and again directed our attention toward the more interesting shore.

Cathryn had been fairly effervescing with interest ever since she had stepped on deck. It was a wonder she had been able to keep her eyes off the Island long enough to take notice of Mulfy's prosaic labour.

"I really think that creek or river over there, or whatever it is, offers about the only fit landing place along this shore," she almost bubbled, keeping her field glasses on the calm, shaded water that reached some distance inland. "Is it possible that we'd come to some native village if we went up that river?"

"We sure would, and lots of niggers to welcome us," Mac chuckled. Turning to me, he added: "Don't you recognize this shore?"

"I remember that river mouth all right," I replied, "but you know when we were here before we could see a village up the river. Now there seems to be nothing but a mass of jungle."

"Ha!" Mac rejoined knowingly, "that's where Koho comes in. I told you he's a fox. He's wiser and worse than his father, and since he's got rid of the old chief, he

naturally has everything his own way. He let all that bush grow so as to hide the whole works."

As if with a sudden afterthought he dug into the pocket of his flannel shirt and produced a scrap of paper and a pencil. Smoothing the paper flat on the cabin top, he started a rough sketch from memory, mostly for Cathryn's benefit.

"Now, here"—he began to accentuate the points of interest as he proceeded with his map—"is the course of that little river. Going upstream, here is a sharp turn to the west—if I remember right—just below a little fall or rapids, or something like that, and from here on, I don't believe even a native canoe could go any further.

"This turn," indicating a location with a cross mark inscribed in a circle, "is just about four or five miles inland, and right in the bend of it is where the *kamal* and the stew-pits are located."

If the three fastidious brass polishers caught any scraps of our conversation, they gave no sign of it; they stoically continued with their labourious task. None of the information we had just received had to be kept secret any longer. Now that we were at our destination, we did not care whether all hands knew our whereabouts or not.

The scrap of paper, having served its purpose for the enlightenment of the interested listeners, lay abandoned upon the cabin top, whence it went fluttering toward the wheel box. For a brief moment it lay on the edge of the coping, flopped over, and fell to the deck, right at the feet of the three artisans, but none of us thought of it any more. There were more important things to be attended to.

It took but a few hours' work with a drag to convince us that we were on good shell bottom. So, after all, we were not on a wild goose chase—if only we could elimi-

nate the Koho menace and get some diving crews to work. There was no telling, however, just what sort of mischief that ape might be up to. We simply had to wait and find out who could stand the watch and wait game the longer. Until that was settled it would have been taking a foolish risk to set boats to work in that quiet cove beyond the point to the east of the river.

Decidedly our first day was score one for Koho.

Just what time of night it was when I was startled from a sound sleep by a most unearthly yell, I did not then bother to find out. There were two good reasons why I did not. When first I found myself sitting suddenly bolt upright in my bunk, I was not quite certain whether my nerves, on edge from so much scheming, were beginning to play tricks with me. That was reason number one. Reason number two settled that question before I had any time to give the matter much thought. It came in a veritable staccato of spattering feet, clicking breech blocks and a confusion of voices on deck as well as in the cabin.

It took me only a few short moments to grab my rifle and go on deck, although I was fully shaken awake only by my own, almost involuntary movements.

Everybody was running toward the port rail, which happened to be on the shore side. Captain Mac beat me to it by just about two jumps. Then we all stood peering shoreward, under the keels of the outswung boats, watching the strangest commotion on the water, that any of us had ever seen. At about one half the distance between the ship and the shore, in the bright moonlight there was something that looked like a giant octopus madly thrashing the water with its tentacles.

We had our rifles ready, but there seemed to be no reason for shooting nor, in fact, any cause for alarm.

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"What the Hell is it anyhow?" I addressed Mac after we had been staring at the strange object long enough to be convinced that we had been robbed of our sleep for no reason at all.

Then the moonlight revealed something else, a little nearer to the ship. There, right in the wake of that crazily flapping creature, we could see three glittering triangles, criss-crossing upon the surface of the water, like signaling heliographs, flashing the moonbeams at us while apparently stalking this thing which in a frenzy seemed trying for dear life to reach the shore.

Mac was as much puzzled as any of us. In all his years at sea and around the Islands, he admitted, he had never seen a show like this.

"Damn'd if I know what to make out o' that," he said, setting down his rifle. "It almost looks as if a bunch of sharks got in a scrap with a devil fish, but what would he do on the surface so far away from the rocks?"

"D'you think that may be some kind of a trick of our mother-in-law-eating friend," Ole Jorgensen suggested. "Something to fool us so we'll come out there?"

"Naw," Mac replied with certainty. "Koho ain't such a fool as to think we'd fall for anything like that."

"Who the Hell gave the alarm?" Mr. Beck grumbled, irritated by this unnecessary disturbance. "Who had the watch on deck?"

There was no reply.

"Who's got the watch?" He repeated the question almost in a bellow.

Silence. All the men were expectantly looking at each other, but no one seemed to be willing to admit the blunder. Then three voices answered almost in unison:

"I had the eleven to twelve!"

"Well, it's after one!" the First Mate suddenly burst

out after a hurried glance through the companionway. "Who th' Hell relieved you? Where's your relief? It's more than another watch since you've been on!"

All hands stood agape.

"Mulfy an' two other blokes relieved us," the three relieved watchmen spoke up, advancing out of the crowd.

"Mulfy! Where's Mulfy?" the Mate bellowed.

There was no reply.

"Mulfy!" once more, then: "Who had the watch with Mulfy?"

No reply. The men all looked questioningly at each other. Little attention was ever paid to such minor details as the name of a beach-comber, unless the man happened to be an outstanding character such as Mulfy. In this case each individual seemed only to know that it was not he who had been on watch.

"Anyone in the fo'c'sle?" I called out, somewhat alarmed by this negligence in such dangerous regions. "They sure wouldn't have jumped overboard."

A count of all hands disclosed the fact that the three men were missing. A search of the fo'c'sle and all other possible hiding places failed to bring them to light. They certainly were not on the ship. All boats, eleven of them, were hanging in their tackles. The wildly floundering thing on the water meanwhile was getting nearer to the shore with the other three objects apparently in pursuit. Could it be possible that had something to do with the disappearance of the watchmen?

In utter perplexity all hands were busying themselves along the rail, peering at the water below the tangles, all around the ship. Suddenly Mac hauled in a slack line which was hanging overboard on the starboard side.

"What's this here?" he shouted, drawing everybody's attention to him.

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"Aw," said Mr. Beck, "that's only the big washtub alongside to swell out."

"Tub—Hell!" Mac retorted, getting the dripping line all on board as we all rushed toward him. "There ain't nothing on this—not even a bowline!"

Mr. Beck started to examine the end of the line to see if it could have been cut, but the end was properly whipped and in ship-shape. He scratched his head, looking at the innocent piece of hemp as if a rope were something foreign to him.

"What the——! S-say——!" He finally exhaled his breath.

"Well—say it!" Ole bristled, snatching the end from his hand.

"The tub was on that line!"

"Hm-m," I muttered, a light suddenly dawning on me; "that tub was big enough to carry four or five men without sinking. Didn't you tell me that Mulfy and two others were damn'd anxious to help put that tub over? Who were the other two?"

"They were them bums who went on the brass cleanin' job with him," Mr. Beck replied, staring at me with his mouth open.

"That's them two blokes 'd wuz on watch with him!" a voice came from the crowd.

Then, as quarter-deck staff looked at fo'c'sle hands, and fo'c'sle hands stared back at quarter-deck staff in dumbfounded astonishment, there came the chorus:

"Well—I'll—b—damn'd!"

We stood like mummies, looking at that queer object on the water disappearing in the shadow of the river's mouth. Captain Mac was the first to recover his speech.

"Well, those fellows'll get a reception they'll never

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forget," he chuckled. "That is, they'll remember it if a man's memory goes to Hell with him."

What crazy pilgrimage those three fools could be up to, no one even attempted to guess. Now that the night scare had been traced to nothing more serious than the escape of three apparent lunatics, everybody began to be hilarious, and some fo'c'sle wit started the little ditty:

Two to toil in the sandy soil—
Why so many to share the spoil?
Two men less in the fo'c'sle mess—
Dead—men—tell—no—tales.

"Only this time there's three." Mr. Jorgensen added as sequel to the song. "They ain't going to toil in no sandy soil; it will be more like a stew pit. They must 'a thought they were a relief society for starvin' niggers."

Mr. Beck had not yet quite recovered from his surprise.

"That's all very well," he said, still puzzling over the problem; "but who gave the alarm? There must have been somebody on deck."

"That yell you heard, young fellow," Captain Mac decided, "was one of the three out there, or maybe the three together, when they saw those sharks that were chasing them. I'll bet my last bob on that. There," he added, pointing toward the mouth of the river, "you can see them fins hanging around there yet. They're afraid to go into the stream 'cause there may be 'gaters in the river, an' sharks an' 'gaters don't agree. Sharks, 'gaters an' Kobo—Lord, what a story those boys could tell if they'd live to tell the tale!"

Then we spliced the main brace, wishing the argonauts success on their journey.

CHAPTER XXI

KOHO

AFTER sunrise there was not much to do except to play at Koho's game of watch and wait. To while away some of the time I called all hands together, to find out if by chance they had overheard any confidences that might have passed between the trio of tub adventurers, and that might suggest a clue as to their motives.

"They wuz talkin' together a lot yist'day," one individual spoke up, "an' oncet I heard Mulfy tell one o' the others they ain't no niggers here, an' they had a slip o' paper that Mulfy put in his pocket. That's all I know."

He had finished his statement with an inquiring, expectant glance at the others who simply stood around shaking their heads, as much mystified as before.

Someone expressed his curiosity as to what they could have taken along, since most of their own personal belongings were still in the fo'c'sle. That started a search of the ship's stores, and the first thing we discovered was that the hatch leading from the main hold to the store-room under the quarter-deck had been opened. Someone had been making a raid on the trade rum. The cook discovered that some of the canned goods were also missing, and Hall reported the loss of four pistols and a quantity of ammunition.

The men evidently had gone well prepared. To have been able to sneak into that store-room and the lazaret

without being caught, proved that at least one of the deserters was possessed of considerably more ability than the average beach-comber. That, at once encouraged the belief among the crew that, under the leadership of such a skilful individual, there would be some hope for the three to evade the crafty natives, and that they might be able to go through with their plan, whatever that could be. We of the quarter-deck, however, had no faith in that theory.

It was about an hour past noon. Mac and the two mates were in the cabin with me, going over some old charts which Mac had made of surrounding waters. Cathryn was lounging in a deck chair under the after awning, seemingly indulging in a little siesta.

Suddenly we heard her rush to the companionway in great excitement.

"Come on deck—quick—all of you!" she called down to us, rattling the doors to emphasize the urgency of immediate compliance. "Bring up your glasses—never mind your guns!" In our haste we reached for almost every instrument in sight. "There—look at that," she urged; "look at that!" All four of us tried to wedge through the door together. Meanwhile Cathryn in her excitement kept waving her field glass toward the shore.

All the men were lined up along the rail. They also seemed to be labouring under great excitement. Something extraordinary must have taken place.

The four telescopes which we had brought up were leveled at the shore simultaneously, and then we all looked at each other with a unanimous:

"Well—what the Hell—?"

There, calmly sitting on the edge of the promontory to the west of the river, apparently viewing the ship at their leisure, with their backs almost resting against the bushes

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behind them, were the figures of three white men. The distance was too great to recognize their faces. However, there was no question raised or argued but that they were Mulfy and his mates.

All hands were now turning inquiring glances toward me, as though to say: "You're the skipper—now what?"

But I knew neither what, nor how, nor where, and neither did Mac nor the mates. That sight was the last thing we had expected. Could Koho and the entire island really be asleep? Or—was it possible—that they were very, very much awake?

All hands looked at me. I was the skipper. They were expecting me to do something and do it quick. That I could read on their faces. But what could I do? Why were those men sitting there, exposing themselves to view after deserting the ship? That did not seem reasonable. Koho *was* a fox, but I could see his hand.

I felt a tension in the silence and knew I was being put to the test by all the men. I could readily imagine their unspoken questions. Would their shipmates be left to their fate? Would they be left to fall into the hands of the savages after evading them?

I knew the type of men we had forward. Too ignorant to see through the native's game, they were thinking that those three men there on the bluff had outwitted the natives, and now they regarded them almost as supermen—whose lives were to be saved at all hazards.

The situation seemed to me unparalleled. The bush behind those men was undoubtedly bristling with spears and arrows—hundreds of them. A landing party would be overwhelmed in no time, retreat cut off by hundreds of canoes. And even if the landing party did not suffer, the three apparently free prisoners would be mercilessly speared. Nevertheless, if I tried to explain the situation

to those fools forward, they would ascribe my caution to a yellow streak, there would be mutiny—the worst thing that could happen on this shore.

All these thoughts came to me in a moment. I don't know whether Mac and the mates had the same visions of what would happen if the quarter-deck were misunderstood at this juncture.

The men looked expectant. My words were on my tongue, ready to talk sense with them—there were twenty-seven of them, and there were guns on the main deck. If only the men could be as patient as Koho!

Suddenly Chin came rushing out of the galley—Chin could smell trouble before it was cooked.

“Cap'n no go sho',” he yelled as if we already were on our way. “Him nigge' felle' him in bush—I catchum befo'.”

That was enough. The tension was relieved. The warning for caution had not come from the quarter-deck, and the men were satisfied. Instead of trying to reason with a mob, I took advantage of their changed mood.

“Come on, boys,” I shouted hilariously, “let's splice the main brace. Mulfy and his pals are as good as saved. Tonight we'll go after them.”

I had not the remotest idea of how to get the three deserters back on board. Whatever fool notion had driven them in shore was beyond me, but one thing was certain—they were now in the hands of the natives and would have to be rescued, although they really deserved to be left to their fate. Chin had prevented the catastrophe Koho had planned. That black devil had not known that those men were deserters. He evidently thought they had been sent in shore to reconnoitre and, as the three looked safe to us, he had expected all of us to make for the shore.

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I called all hands aft and immediately embarked upon a quarter-deck parley, the result of which I hardly expected would fall just short of being a miracle.

* * * * *

About two hours before daylight on the following morning the *Glenora's* deck was buzzing with activity. Three boats were cautiously lowered, yet there was not the slightest rattling of block sheaves audible. This extreme caution was only a ruse, for we knew only too well that all our movements were being watched by hundreds of lynx eyes in shore. But our exaggerated caution was part of our game—the natives were to be made to believe that the whites were fools enough to think they could sneak in shore unobserved.

Weapons were distributed though not really needed in the scheme. They were taken as a precaution in case the plan should not work as expected. The boats were being manned on the offshore side of the ship—further to deceive the watchers in shore. The mates and I each took command of a boat with eight men at the oars and a rifleman in the bow. Captain Mac was left in charge of the ship, with Cathryn, the supercargo and the cook. It was a risky undertaking, to be sure, but those who would not take a chance—with an eye to wisdom as well as valour—never succeeded in trading with the Solomons.

With feigned caution, well indicated by noiseless manipulation of the oars, the three boats crept stealthily toward the bluff where the three men had appeared the day before. The natives, of course, thought that a landing was to be made at this point, and we were deliberate enough in our movements to give every black rascal along the shore a chance to concentrate there for a surprise attack.

Suddenly, within about forty yards from the bluff, we halted as if we had scented danger, and then, with every man putting every ounce of strength into the oars, we darted toward the cove on the east side of the river, just around the wooded point.

But we did not land there. As soon as we were certain of being well hidden by the point, we made a queer manoeuvre. Every man in each boat, except one for sculling, crouched low in the shelter of the gunwales. Thus the boats were sculled back to the ship by the shortest route, apparently with only one man in each.

By this stratagem the savages were led to believe that the bush beyond the point was full of armed men just landed there from our boats. As daylight was near at hand, they were not fools enough to offer themselves as targets—particularly as the unprotected ship could now be captured with ease. They thought they had the upper hand. The white men in the bush would not long survive after the ship was taken.

They knew enough not to try to cut off the retreat of the three scullers in the boats. Obviously the rangers in the bush would cover them with their rifles, and anyway three men were not to be reckoned with seriously.

The three boats were sculled to the off-shore side of the ship, and then, unseen from the shore, all hands clambered on board to await the success of the trick.

Daylight was approaching. The *Glenora* was riding at her anchor, a tempting prize for the savages. In the cabin, half a dozen telescopes were watching canoe after canoe being slid from the bush to the water's edge and launched by four or five warriors. The canoes had been emerging from their hiding-places long before the scullers had reached the ship, but they were still coming forth until there were more than twoscore of them. Then the

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dawn revealed on the promontory three lonely, dejected-looking white captives. They had a hang-dog appearance and were seemingly overcome by exhaustion.

Mac was alongside of me. Both of us had our glasses leveled on the now well-inhabited shore.

"It does look as if we're going to get away with it," he chuckled, effervescing with anticipation. "See, they're manning the boats. Lord, what a bunch of them; there's—"

He stopped suddenly and looked at me in surprise. The fleet of canoes had started, but they did not steer for the ship; they were gliding along the shore toward the west.

For a while I was puzzled by this movement, but then, all at once a light dawned upon me.

"Don't you see," I said; "we fooled them so well that Koho thinks he'll show us he can be just as clever as we were? They know that the rifles of the men supposed to be in the bush could reach them anywhere between the ship and the shore, so they'll swing way around to the west and come from the other side of the ship."

"You're right," he replied, as we saw the fleet begin to swing to the north in a wide semi-circle. "Come on; let's get our guns and go on deck."

That wide circle was gradually swinging to the north, then, when the natives were certain that no rifle ball from the shore could reach them, they steered east. Then, well abreast of the ship, they kept it in line with themselves and the point where the riflemen were thought to be, and advanced for the attack.

They were coming, a long line of black spots, as if they had just crossed over from Oema. They paddled swiftly but noiselessly, using their goal for their protection. The attack was to be so overwhelming that the

few men supposed to be on board would be borne down without a chance of defense.

These were unmistakably Koho's forces, advancing for battle. There were no war cries. Any savages could make a noise. Koho believed in action only. He was a general.

Now they were but a hundred yards away. The sun was up, and it was possible to distinguish the various black forms one from another.

They knew about the tangles with which the ships that ventured near their shores were equipped. Heaps of matting were in their canoes—thick, hard, woven, fibre blankets to be thrown over the wicked spikes and render them harmless.

Eighty yards—seventy—sixty, and not a shot had greeted them. Success must have seemed assured—it was easier than the capture of the *Dorset*.

Ten yards nearer, and then—a roar of gun-fire such as their savage ears had never heard—came from under our boats along the rail of the ship, and puffs of blue smoke went drifting astern in the light breeze.

We could only imagine their surprise. That greeting must have been a severe shock. Even the most ignorant of them—those who had never seen a white trader—must have known that that volley was not released by only three men.

The line of canoes was suddenly disordered, the paddles which, a few seconds ago, had been wielded with so much confidence, came abruptly to rest. The canoes shot a few yards ahead from their own momentum, some swerving to the right, others to the left, the direction depending upon whether some limp body, now dragging lifelessly in the water and acting as a rudder for the craft, fell to this side or that.

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Lost paddles were drifting about, and a panicky wail, ending in a fierce, demoniac yell, broke the silence. It looked as if the raiders were wavering.

We took advantage of their indecision, and as fast as the men could reload—we had only old-fashioned, single-shot rifles—our bullets kept finding their marks or plowing the water close to them.

The lust for battle gripped the natives. They were not of a sort to let their fallen tribesmen go unavenged. One by one other canoes came from seemingly nowhere along the shore, and sped directly toward us. They doubtless realized they had been tricked, and they were filled with fury and determination.

With marrow-piercing yells they started a wild sortie for the ship, heedless of the incessant firing by the crew. They were ready to depend upon their superior numbers, which their leader had organized during his two days' apparent inactivity, and they had discovered that after all the rifles were not so terrible—a good many of the bullets went astray.

More than a dozen of the canoes were already alongside. Fibre mats were beginning to fly upon the wire tangles, and though some of them were successfully pushed back by our rifle muzzles, there were soon too many of them and they came too fast. Once they were in place, furiously howling figures leaped upon them like cats scaling a fence. But the covering boats kept the natives from leaping on deck. It was less easy for them to clamber over the tilting, swaying boats than to jump to the matting from their own familiar canoes.

But it was now difficult for us to shoot. The men did not have much time to reload—they were kept too busy clubbing hostile heads with rifle butts, or slashing at them with cutlasses and bush-knives.

Eight or nine blacks ducked to crawl under the keel of one of the heavy boats, like snakes, flat on their bellies. Someone released the stops of the boat-falls, and the howling demons were pinned under the heavy whaleboat like rats caught in a pinchtrap. But even then they held on to their spears, and stabbed viciously at all those who came near them.

Others had crept under the bow, and were climbing the headgear. Some of them already had gained the deck, and already there were several fire-hardened wood spears clashing against cutlasses and rifle barrels.

Crimson spots were beginning to stain the deck. Several black bodies were already lying motionless, and quite a few of the defenders were bleeding.

Suddenly a figure leaped toward me on to the taffrail, and the next instant my cutlass swished across its throat, and sent its severed head spinning overboard before its feet even touched the deck. To my surprise, several of the savages in the canoes who had been about to leap up at me, dove after the head.

Mac, who was near me, effectively using his pistol, had seen this.

"Throw down your guns, boys," he shouted above the clamour. "Use your cutlasses and take heads. They're headhunters themselves. Make 'em think we're headhunters, too."

Their panicky fear of having the severed head of one of their tribesmen fall into the hands of their enemies, and of later being haunted by his headless body, would cause some of them to stop fighting and expose themselves long enough to salvage the head.

Those of our men, who had still been using the rifle butts, now took to the less unwieldy weapons, and fought like mad, but it looked as if we had no chance to stay

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that steadily onpouring swarm of blacks. Death seemed to have no horrors for them.

The boats, which had been used in the decoy landing, were still alongside, moored to their painters. There had been no time to hoist them on board, and the tackles were loosely dangling upon the thwarts in bows and sterns.

A canoe had pushed its way between one of those boats and the ship, just aft of midships. Its occupants had leaped to the rail, where there were no covering boats, and five of us were just parrying their spearthrusts and slashing at the boarders. Another canoe came alongside of the same boat, and an apish, dwarfish figure made a flying leap across the boat, aiming for the nearer canoe. His ankle caught in the dangling tackle, and he went sprawling across the boat.

In a jiffy both mates had hold of the tackle, and they yanked the kicking, snarling creature feet first to the rail. My left hand buried itself in the greasy mop of his bushy hair, pulling his head over backward across the broad teak-wood capping. My right hand swung the heavy blade of my cutlass aloft for a blow which would leave at least one head in our possession.

Suddenly I heard a plaintive wail ring out from more than twoscore savage throats, and at the same time my wrist was gripped from behind. I half turned, trying to free my hand from this unexpected assailant, and to my surprise I saw that it was Mac.

"Stop, boy!" he shouted above the wolf-like howl of the savages. "Stop! Koho alive and a prisoner is worth more to you than his head."

I stood aghast, my weapon poised above my head, Mac still clutching my wrist, and as I viewed the deck, hardly able to believe my ears, I saw the crew driving the

frightened, howling invaders before them like so many harmless sheep.

The mates and the supercargo had gripped the ankles and wrists of this demon ape, to stop his kicking and clawing as he snarlingly tried to free himself. Mac wrenched the spear from his claw-like hand, and then, once more his voice rang out:

"Stop your fighting, boys. They're harmless now. We got Koho!"

It seemed as if a magic spell had been cast upon the savages. The fierce, fearless warriors of only a few seconds ago were now like so many frightened children. Those who had gained the deck had thrown away their weapons, and were depending upon the fleetness of their legs to keep out of the way of the infuriated whites. There was no fight left in any of them.

Some of the men had heard about Koho's bloody career, and to them as to me his capture seemed almost incredible. They stood looking at Mac as if they thought he had lost his senses. Then the fright of the natives must have struck home to them, and when they saw the prostrate body we were holding between us, they came stamping aft. Everyone of them wanted to get a glimpse of this devil of devils.

There he was with his neck across the rail as if strapped on an executioner's block. His naturally over-large ears, made larger by ornaments of shell and bone, set in holes that were inches in diameter, were spread upon the varnished teak-wood like chops upon a butcher's counter. The nostrils of his broad flat nose almost completely covered by an enormous polished bone bodkin through the nosebridge, were deflating and expanding with the fitful panting of his breath, as he vainly struggled to free himself from our grasp. His sharpened, yellow-stained

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fangs, showing between broad lips curled back in a continuous snarl, spasmodically opened and clenched in an attempt to snap at the hands that held him—an effort rendered futile only by the grip I had on his bushy mop of hair, which, lime-bleached to almost an orange hue, crowned his large, gnome-like, squirming head. Under the strain of his exertions the muscles of his scrawny neck and sinewy body looked like strings stretched almost to the breaking point, under his oil-smeared black-brown skin.

Such was the grimacing spectacle of hate incarnate that now presented itself to the assembled crew. It really took an effort at self-control not to make use of my blade, thus to end the diabolical treacheries toward unwary mariners, that had often originated within this hideous head.

Hall had rushed below for a set of hand and leg irons, but as he appeared on deck again, Chin snatched the jingling implements from him. He evidently thought himself a more fitting agent for such an important function.

With a long bush-knife stuck in his belt, a sheathknife clasped between his teeth, besmeared with blood, partly his own and partly Malanesian, he certainly, more than ever, fitted the rôle of fierce Mongolian pirate, as he adjusted the symbols of pacification, none too gently, to the bony wrists and ankles of Koho.

The wolf-like howl of the savages on deck as well as alongside had by now simmered down to a mere frightened whimper. Some of them were frantically gesticulating toward the shore, where, on the promontory beside the three captives, a number of naked black figures had appeared, all of them seemingly also in a high state of excitement.

Koho was dropped on deck, the key to the ferocity of all

his tribesmen whose panicky fear for his life bespoke more than mere loyalty toward an ordinary chief.

Our men had good reason to send up cheer after cheer. Despite the many wounds there was not a single casualty, but our miraculous victory was nothing compared to what we had gained. We now were able to accomplish the object of our expedition, and we could demand the liberation of those fool deserters, whose crazy mission, whatever it was, had really opened our road to success.

Chin, being familiar with several of the Malanesian dialects, I requested him to make known our wishes to this manacled ape, lying prostrate on the deck, glaring at his captors with hatred, while the other savages, inconceivably frightened, huddled together around the mainmast.

Chin grinned at me and pointed his bony finger at the helpless cannibal chief.

"Him nigge' felle' him spick English. Him sma't felle'. Him catchum wo'd dam quick." He surprised us by seeming to treat the whole episode as a big joke.

As if to verify the cook's statement, Koho suddenly raised himself to a sitting posture. By now we were all pretty well used to surprises, but that this beast should have had enough intercourse with white men to have acquired a smattering of their language seemed almost incredible. Nevertheless, the brains of some of those savages were remarkable for their absorbant qualities. Koho was about to give us a demonstration of that.

"Wantum rum, too much big fella rum!" He made known his demands in a shrill voice.

The crew gave vent to a burst of laughter, and hilarious expressions of desire to see the effect of the liquor on this man-ape. Bottles were quickly brought up, and as the men assembled around the cook and Hall, to partake in the

victory celebration, they almost had to resort to the cutlass again to check the sudden onrush of the blacks at sight of the rum, the white man's most cherished possession. Even the most primitive of the savages seemed to know its value.

Chin held a half-filled quart bottle of the vilest trade rum to Koho's lips, and immediately those sharpened teeth gripped the neck of the bottle, which he doubtless would have bitten off had any attempt been made to withdraw the bottle before it was drained of the very last drop. Then, after a little sputtering cough, the fiercest of cannibals flopped over, and went peacefully to sleep.

"I guess he got the taste of it the time he cut off the *Dorset*," Mac chuckled as he went below to open the state-room where he had kept his indignant wife an unwilling prisoner during the heat of the battle.

She was in none too good a humour at this compulsory confinement. Mac had locked her door before she had awakened, knowing only too well that the sound of the first volley would have brought her on deck. It took quite a little of Mac's good-natured joviality to pacify her, but after a little pouting spell she was willing to grace the deck with her presence. Perhaps it was woman's curiosity more than Mac's power of persuasion that applied the balm to her hurt pride.

She viewed the drunkenly sleeping chief with about the same repelled yet irresistible interest that any of her sisters are apt to display when they stand rooted in spellbound horror in front of the glass cages used in menageries for exhibiting giant cobras or boa-constrictors. She paid little attention to the activity on deck, where the sullen savages were now removing the dozen or more bodies of their fallen tribesmen. Curiously enough her first question—probably for a woman the most natural—was:

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"What uncanny influence do you think this horrible creature could have had over all his subjects, that they should have feared so for his life?"

"That," said Mac, "is very simple."

"About thirty years ago, I should say it was 'round '55 or '56, when Koho was born, there were a few sandalwood traders who could have intimate dealings with the old chief—Koho's father. They used to get along quite well except with the devil-devil doctors, who hated them worse than poison. Probably no graft was to be had out of the trading. Be that as it may, they could not influence the chief to massacre the whites.

"At the time when Koho came to the light, there had been some kind of a tribal war, and Koho's tribe—I forget the name of the old chief—had quite a few heads to their credit. The priests—that's what those devil-devil doctors really are—took advantage of the occasion, and performed a ritual by smearing Koho all over with the blood of their enemies. Then they told the tribesmen that they had received a warning from the gods that all who came near their shores were enemies, and that they must never have any intercourse with them except by way of arms.

"To force the ignorant niggers to obey that mandate, they thought they might as well add a little zest to it by making it a little stronger, so they scared them half green by telling them that after death their combined 'manas'—that's their word for spirit or personality or some such humbug—would go to Koho, which would make him the greatest chief that ever lived. Consequently, if his head should ever fall into the hands of his enemies, his ghost would be able to appear in the shape of an octopus-devil which could devour the whole island, niggers and all.

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"I got that from one of those sandal-wood traders about twenty-five years ago, and the fellow told me that after that black cuss over there"—contemptuously pointing at the manacled figure on deck—"was born, there wasn't a chance in the world for any one to approach this island—at any rate not this part of it.

"Well," Mac concluded, starting below to clean up, "the rest you've heard from the chink. We'll have to watch out that none of the niggers sneak on board here during the nights and steal our prize."

There was a prolonged pause, during which all those who had listened, stood around and regarded the sleeping Koho with renewed interest. Someone had thrown a piece of lod canvas over the naked body, but the exceptionally long sinewy arms and the unsightly face and head protruded.

"Gee, what a reputation to run amuck with!" Mr. Beck sighed, wiping the sweat from his brow.

"I can't imagine anything worse," Cathryn agreed, turning away.

"I can," I called after her. Her good humour seemed to have returned. She gave me a mocking glance over her shoulder.

"*Kava!*—That's the time I beat you," she said, disappearing below.

CHAPTER XXII

A FORTUNE IN PEARL SHELL AND SANDAL-WOOD

NO parleying with the natives was necessary to make condition number one of our peace treaty known to them. The fact that we held their highly esteemed chief—which must have caused considerable consternation on the Island—suggested to them at once that an exchange of prisoners would be in order.

Their anxiety about the highly honoured one's safety was well demonstrated. Even while Captain Mac had been reciting Koho's early biography, a detachment of canoes hurried in shore, and soon afterward three or four of them returned with the three fear-stiffened adventurers.

We did not bother to find out whether their willingness to make the rate of exchange at the odds of three to one, was inspired by underestimation of Mulfy and his pals as a possible diet, or whether it was due to the extreme value placed on Koho's head. We simply informed them, with Chin acting as interpreter, that our idea of a fair rate was just three to nothing, and that Koho was to remain as our guest until we were ready to leave the Island.

That the extension of our hospitality toward their chief was necessary as a guarantee that all the conditions of our treaty were to be observed, so that we should encounter no more difficulties in dealing with them, in exchanging our goods for their services as divers or as labourers in the gathering of sandal-wood, we drove into their skulls only by energetic harangues. In the end it was evident

they preferred submission to lowly labour and trade to the prospect of having Koho's ghost devouring them, hide and hair. We, in turn, let it be known that we would be very generous with the supply of rum and tobacco, and thus the pact of peace was signed.

There may be difference of opinion as to the proper treatment of a returned deserter. If the *Glenora* had been a warship, the fate of her three renegades would undoubtedly have been a month's detention in the brig—the calaboose of a man o'war—followed by a few additional months of blacklist and the denial of the privileges which men with good records may enjoy.

On a mercantile ship, where men "sign on" for the trip, desertion is nothing more than a breach of contract. The man simply forfeits all the wages he has earned up to the time of his disappearance.

A trader, however, was in a class by himself. Men did not "sign on," and they were at liberty to go whenever they pleased. Romantic readers may be disappointed to learn that for that reason neither Mulfy nor the two others were hung up by their thumbs, or keelhaunched, or otherwise subjected to piratical torture.

In a way they had done us a great service—they had unwittingly solved the vexing problem of how to deal with Koho; so, why give them even a lecture? One thing they did get, however—a constant volley of ribald jeers from the crew. And after we had learned the motive of their expedition the three remained butts for the jokes of all hands and the cook, to the end of the trip.

They had had about all they wanted of the sort of adventure they had been after, for their forced acquaintance with the bushmen had by no means improved their physical condition and they were not at all enthusiastic over their reception on the Island. In fact, they seemed to

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be in a frame of mind which would have enabled them to witness joyfully the decapitation of Koho.

They were not exactly hurt. In the sort of reception they had met with on the Island a few friendly spear-jabs by way of introduction and persuasion, or to guide one to one's place of abode, or to coach one in the rôle of decoy, must not be considered injuries.

Cathryn and Mac persuaded me that in view of the service which the three culprits had rendered us, it would be best simply to forget the theft of the goods from the store-room and the lazaret, but we unanimously agreed upon at least demanding a solution of the mystery of their motive.

To judge by Mulfy's actions it was plain that he realized he was about to confess himself a much bigger ass even than we thought him. If he had been a romancing boy, of say twelve to fourteen years of age, there might have been some excuse for the peculiar working of his mind, but Mulfy had reached the manly age of twenty-two and had all the appearance of a normal, rather strapping young fellow.

The whole after-guard were seated in an expectant circle around the trio, in the shade of the after awning, and we were doing our best to dispel the embarrassment the three were labouring under by trying to make them feel as comfortable as possible. Eventually a few drinks of good Scotch got Mulfy into a talkative mood. He, as I had suspected, turned out to be the instigator of the plot, and the others seemed to be quite willing to leave the explanations to him.

"What was the matter with you that night, Mulfy?" I asked kindly enough. "Were the three of you cracked?"

Mulfy looked at me as if to say that I should know better than to ask such a fool question.

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"No, we wasn't cracked," he retorted. "We was sober, good and sober."

"Well," I pursued, not quite convinced of that, "the way you fellows carried on out there on the water, after leaving your watch unrelieved, it looked to us as if you'd been kissing some squareface with a pretty strong breath, and then yelling like all the niggers on the Island were after you."

Mulfy regarded me as if with pity for my ignorance.

"Skipper," he returned reprovingly, "if you'd been out there and seen them maneating sharks all of a sudden, you'd a gotten a move on, too—with nothing but a wash-tub to be in and a couple of barrel staves to row with."

To this information or ultimatum or whatever it was meant to be, the other two nodded their assent quite meaningfully.

"But why the devil," put in Mac with impatient curiosity, "did you want to go out there in the first place? Didn't you know that the niggers here are the worst in the Solomons?"

"We didn't know where we were," Mulfy declared. "We didn't see a nigger all day. Who'd bury treasure on an island full of niggers?"

"Wha-wha-what's that?" Mac stammered. We all bent toward Mulfy as if expecting to be let in on a dark secret. He favoured Mac with a malevolently accusing glance.

"Didn't you say something about buried treasure where we were going? Wasn't I at the wheel an' heard it when you said that?"

Mac stared at him, blankly perplexed, then looked at me as though to ask whether I thought the fellow was all there or not.

"Didn't you make a map of it for the crowd here?"

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Mulfy continued heatedly, almost defiantly, and reached in his pocket for a dirty, crumpled piece of paper. "Didn't you mark it there and say it was four or five miles up the river?"

With this last shot he spread the paper upon the knee of his dirty trousers, and exultantly tapping it with a grimy finger, still stared in an accusing way at Mac.

Mac slumped back in his deck chair, his hands helplessly hanging down by his sides, a picture of utter bewilderment and resignation. He glanced neither at Mulfy nor the paper, which had a rather familiar look; he just stared at the deck in front of him and slowly, almost pityingly shook his head.

"Balmy!" he mumbled, half to himself. "Damn balmy! It must be the heat in the Solomons."

The rest of us leaned forward, although we, too, had recognized the slip of paper. Mulfy's finger was still tapping the cross-mark with the circle around it on Mac's rough sketch, showing the location of Koho's *kamal* and stew-pits.

Cathryn placed a hand on Mac's knee.

"Don't you see, dear," she said, "the circle and cross you made on that sketch are exactly the kind used in pirate stories to mark buried treasure? Isn't it strange that those marks of yours, through an absurd mistake, should have opened the treasures of the Island to us?" As the full humour of the affair struck her, she gave herself to a peal of laughter, which, like a match touching off a bomb, exploded all the pent-up mirth of Mulfy's audience. Even his erstwhile accomplices saw the humour of it and joined in.

When order was restored, and the wounded men began to realize that excessive gayety has bad after-effects for those not fully sound of body, I reached for the slip of

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paper, and folding it, handed it back to the disillusioned and mortified adventurer.

"Mulfy," I said, half pitying the poor fool, "keep this as a souvenir, and whenever you get the idea in your head that you have brains, look at it and reflect.

"You're of age, and I understand that your father is wealthy, so when we get back I'm going to write to him and tell him what I think of him for ever turning you out into the world."

"Polly all over again," Mac soliloquized. "Polly all over again. But what have we done that they must dump their discards on the sea?"

With that we dismissed the culprits to settle down to the serious work of trading.

* * * * *

When, nearly three months later, we released Koho, our distinguished guest—released him when our anchor was catted and fished, not before—to go back once more to his favourite diet of mothers-in-law and discarded wives, we had a fortune in pearl shell and sandal-wood in our hold, and made sail for Levuka. Sydney and Melbourne no longer favoured the free-lance trader.

The End.

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